

EMPOWERED WOMEN RESIST:
THREE BLACK WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

FATIMAH S. SALLEH: Empowered Women Resist:
Three Black Women Journalists in the Struggle for Civil Rights
(Under the Direction of Dr. Jane D. Brown and Dr. Donald Shaw)

The Civil Rights Movement, 1947-1968, was a time of great change and resistance for African Americans. The black press played a crucial role as African-American journalists conveyed the hopes and frustrations of their people and rallied citizens to fight for their rights. Although previously understudied, a number of the most powerful writers of the era were black female journalists. This dissertation examines the lives and work of journalists and journalism educators Lucile Bluford, Francis Murphy, and Dorothy Gilliam, based on analysis of their writing and oral histories recorded as part of the Washington Press Club's Oral History Project. Black feminist, alternative, and ethnic media theories are used to understand these women's lives and work.

Frances L. Murphy's reign as the owner and editor of the long standing *Afro-American* newspaper provides a distinct look at black-centered advocacy writing during the Civil Rights era. In contrast, Dorothy Gilliam migrated from the black press to the noted mainstream paper, the *Washington Post*, and became its first black female editor. Lucile Bluford battled for racial equity in the ranks of journalism education and contested the University of Missouri's segregated admittance policies while pursuing a 30-year career as reporter, editor, and eventual proprietor of the *Kansas City Call*.

Although the life story of each woman is unique, the similarities of their focus and approach were striking. All three women fought throughout their lives for racial parity. They fought for school segregation despite their positive experiences with black schooling. Their voices championed voting rights and health care in the black community, and they encouraged their readers to participate in the struggle for equality. They spoke out against police brutality and raised money to fuel worthy causes. All three women spoke and wrote about those who had paved their way, lauded their successful contemporaries, and expressed gratitude for the black men who were their mentors and advocates.

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When people ask, “how did you do it?” I know it was the grace of God. Without divine help, this would not have been possible. I could definitely see His love through my wonderful support system. Here is the village that helped raise me:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
A Neglected Area of History	3
Lucile Bluford of the <i>Call</i>	7
Francis Murphy: A Newspaper Scion	10
Dorothy Gilliam: A Newspaper Pioneer	13
II. ORAL HISTORY METHODOLOGY	15
Oral History as a Method.....	16
Analysis of the Transcripts and Newspaper Articles.....	20
Chapter Overview.....	22
III. THE HISTORICAL LEGACY OF BLACK WOMEN’S SURVIVAL AND RESISTANCE	24
Slave Survival Amid A Cultural Castration	25
Slave Women’s Harsher Plight.....	26
Slave Survival as Resistance	27
Surviving Reconstruction and Jim Crow	28
Emerging Resistant Strategies in Reconstruction and Jim Crow	31
The Black Church’s Role in Resistance and Journalism	32
The Civil Rights Era	35

Black Press History	34
The Black Press in the Civil Rights Movement	37
The Black Press and Black Journalists	40
Alternative Media Theory and Ethnic Media Theory.....	41
Resistant Eras and Revolutionary Journalists.....	45
Slavery and Journalism.....	45
Maria W. Stewart (1803-1879).....	46
Mary Ann Shadd Cary (1823-1893).....	46
Journalism in the Jim Crow Era	48
Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954).....	49
Charlotta A. Bass (1874-1969).....	51
Black Feminist Standpoint Theory	54
Black Women and Mainstream Feminism	55
The Five Themes of Black Women's Empowerment and Resistance.....	58
Journalism History and Application of Black Feminist Theory	65
IV. BLACK FEMINIST THEORY IN THE LIVES OF BLUFORD, MURPHY, AND GILLIAM.....	71
Lucile Bluford (1911-2003).....	72
Francis Murphy (1922-2007).....	83
Dorothy B. Gilliam (1936-)	94
V. BLACK INK.....	110
The Voice of Lucile Bluford in the <i>Call</i>	111
Dorothy Gilliam's Voice in <i>The Washington Post</i>	122

Francis Murphy's Voice in the <i>Afro</i>	136
VI. ECHOES OF THE PAST HEARD IN THE PRESENT	149
Black Male Mentors	150
Acknowledging Those Who Went Before.....	152
The Value of Black Schooling.....	154
Black Feminist Theory: Themes of Empowerment and Resistance	157
Importance of Self-Redefinition	157
Self-Development	158
Alternative and Ethnic Media Theories	159
APPENDIX	162
BIBLIOGRAPHY	174

Chapter 1:
Introduction and Background

“One had better die fighting against injustice than die like a dog or a rat in a trap.”

--Ida B. Wells ¹

At age 16, Ida B. Wells, the oldest of eight children, was orphaned when both her parents died of yellow fever. Wells took on the responsibility of supporting and raising her seven siblings. She worked as a teacher and started to wear her hair in a bun to look older. The hairstyle remained her signature “do” the rest of her life. At 22, Ida B. Wells bit the hand of a train conductor who tried to forcibly remove her from the ladies car because she was black. It took three men to physically drag her from the train car. Wells sued the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad and won in the circuit court, receiving \$500 in damages. Three years later the Tennessee Supreme Court reversed the decision.

The train incident propelled Wells into her journalism career. The local Memphis papers asked her to write the personal account.² Her articles describing the experience

¹ Stephanie Tolliver, "Women in History: Living Vignettes of Notable Women from U.S. History, Lakewood, Ohio Public Library, <http://www.lkwdpl.org/wihohio/barn-ida.htm> (accessed May 12, 2008).

²Ida B. Wells, “A Darky Damsel Obtains a Verdict for Damages against Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad,” *Memphis Daily Appeal*, April 11, 1887, p.4.

and the lawsuit led to subsequent writing opportunities. In 1889, she purchased a third of the interest in a newspaper for blacks called *Free Speech and Headlight*, originally called the *Memphis Free Speech*.³ The success of the paper, due in part to Wells' relentless campaign to increase subscriptions, allowed Wells to pursue writing as a full-time career.⁴

At the pinnacle of her militant muckraking career in 1892, Wells wrote about three black males who were brutally murdered for owning a local grocery store that financially jeopardized a nearby white-owned market. Enraged, Wells wrote against the lynching and embarked on convincing the local, black townspeople to leave the city in protest.⁵ Her readers responded with their feet and hundreds relocated, financially debilitating the city. After galvanizing the exodus, Wells, now a marked woman in the South, wrote in exile. The threats only increased her advocacy writing, however, especially for stronger anti-lynching policies and laws, for integrated schools in Chicago, women's suffrage, and for the establishment of the NAACP.⁶

Thus, one woman managed to take part in crippling a Southern town, preventing segregated schools in Chicago, and in the establishment of an important national organization. Arguably the best known black female journalist, Ida B. Wells is not the only black woman whose story is of journalistic trial, tenacity, and triumph, however. The stories

³ Alfred M. Duster, ed., *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 35-37.

⁴ Lee D. Baker, *Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truths: Autobiographies and the Making of African American Intellectual Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996),

<http://www.duke.edu/~ldbaker/classes/AAIH/caaih/ibwells/ibwbkgrd.html> (accessed October 8, 2007).

⁵ Alfred M. Duster, ed., *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 52.

⁶ Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 49-60.

of a number of Wells' successors who also contributed to changing the racist and sexist social climates in which they lived remain to be told.

Wells' life serves as a launching block for this research project that focuses on the journalistic careers of three African-American women journalists who lived and wrote during the Civil Rights Movement and whose lives and accomplishments deserve documentation and analysis.

A Neglected Area of History

Historians can write a history of anything or anyone but the key is the historian must decide that thing, event, person or group is worthy of investigation and apparently no one had ever thought Black women . . . were worth studying. -Darlene Clark Hine⁷

The focus in this project is on black women because their achievements have not been documented as thoroughly as their male counterparts even though black women were disproportionately more involved in the early years of the Civil Rights Movement.⁸ One example--in 1944, 14 years before the much-noted Greensboro sit-ins,⁹ Pauli Murray, the granddaughter of a slave and the great granddaughter of a slave owner, staged a sit-in with fellow Howard University students at the segregated cafeteria, Thompson's. She and her fellow students sat all day, reading textbooks and poetry until they were finally served hours later. Thus, approximately 50 black students, mostly women, had successfully planned,

⁷ PBS, "Shattering the Silences: Minority Professors Break into the Ivory Tower," Gail Pellett Productions, <http://www.pbs.org/shattering/shattering2.html> (accessed May 12, 2008, 2008).

⁸ Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998) 267, 268.

⁹ On February 1, 1960, four male African American students from North Carolina A & T sat at a segregated lunch counter in the Greensboro, North Carolina, Woolworth's store. They were refused service but were allowed to stay at the counter and staged a sit-in that would spark a run of sit-ins across the country.

executed and desegregated the local establishment. Fourteen years later, black male students in the highly hailed Greensboro, N.C., would stage a sit in at Woolworth's using these same non-violent tactics but attract much more publicity than the women had.¹⁰

Because black women activists have been given short shrift in the chronicles of the Civil Rights Movement, this project examines the Civil Rights Movement from the lens of black women. Part of augmenting current historical dialogue to include more about black women is the important task of unearthing and understanding their stories of strength and survival. Even Rosa Parks, historically known as the "First Lady of the Civil Rights Movement" because she refused to give up her bus seat to a white patron, has not been accurately depicted. According to Lynne Olson, author of *Freedom's Daughters*, "Parks was far more than the image that Martin Luther King, among others, had crafted for her--a seamstress too tired to move, who had been less a free agent than a vessel of the forces of history...In fact, she had been a committed civil rights activist since the 1940s, a staunch member of the NAACP with a history of rebellion against casual cruelties of white bus drivers."¹¹

By excavating and examining the lives of black women journalists, this research offers an expanded look into the Civil Rights Movement. This project focuses on the ways in which some black women made the most of their resources, such as journalism, in their fight for equality. Throughout black history, journalism has often served as a tool for resistance. As the formation of organizations strengthened the reach of black women's resistance and activism, historian Darlene Clark Hine wrote that "not sufficiently noted among black

¹⁰ Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroes of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830-1970* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 13.

¹¹ Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 13.

women's tools was the press." In her encyclopedia of *Black Women in America*, Hine pays homage to the work of black women journalists of the Jim Crow era and their efforts to spotlight and abolish the injustices of the time: "They wrote. They edited. They were owners and operators. They made public policy and every aspect of Jim Crow a daily fare. They gave voice to rights and wrongs. They tore into stereotypes in battling against the abysmal place of both the Negro and the women."¹²

African-American women journalists remain overlooked and understudied in historical research, however, as journalism historian Rodger Streitmatter noted in the preface of his book, *Raising Her Voice: African American Women Journalists Who Changed History*. Streitmatter said he just happened across the autobiography of Alice Dunnigan, the first black woman to cover the White House, when he was working on another topic. Sparked by this resource, Streitmatter pursued the notion of writing about African-American women journalists and their contributions to news history. He found there was much to be done. "When I referred to the standard history of American journalism, I found a description of the career of only one black woman, Ida B. Wells—whose life was compressed into seven lines. Nor were histories of the African-American press of much help. When I looked at that standard in the field, I found that the descriptions of women of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were limited to a dozen pages."¹³

More than a decade after Streitmatter's research on 11 influential black female journalists, the research on African-American women journalists is still sparse.¹⁴ As historian

¹² Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Women in America," in *Jim Crow*, 36 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹³ Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 1-2.

¹⁴ Streitmatter researched these women from the Antebellum Period: Maria W. Stewart, Mary Ann Shadd Cary; from the Jim Crow era: Gertrude Bustill Mossell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Delilah L.

Jinx Coleman Broussard noted in 2004: “Black women journalists have remained virtually invisible in the literature about the history of the black press, the feminist, and the mainstream press. The historical experiences of the female journalists have received little attention and, likewise, neither have their issues been addressed.”¹⁵ In her book, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Journalists*, Broussard provides biographies of three other black women journalists (Mary Church Terrell, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Amy Jacques Garvey) and their overlooked contributions to journalism. Despite the historical contributions of Streitmatter and Broussard, who together profiled 14 black women journalists, many others remain overlooked and understudied, especially those who wrote during the Civil Rights era.

This research focuses on three black women journalists who wrote during the Civil Rights era -- Lucile Bluford, Francis Murphy, and Dorothy Gilliam. These women have not been extensively written about before. This research analyzes in-depth interviews conducted¹⁶ with Bluford, Murphy and Gilliam and their newspaper writings to better understand their lives and work.

Meet the Journalists: Lucile Bluford, Francis Murphy, and Dorothy Gilliam

Lucile Bluford of The Call

On June 13, 2003, Lucile Bluford died at age 91 having dedicated more than 70 years of her life to journalism. Almost all of her career was spent with the *Kansas City Call*, a

Beasley, Marvel Cooke; and from the Civil Rights era: Charlotta A. Bass, Alice Allison Dunnigan, Ethel L. Payne and Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

¹⁵ Jinx Coleman Broussard, *Giving A Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

¹⁶ Washington Press Club, “Women in Journalism Oral History Project of the Washington Press Club,” <http://www.wpcf.org/project-overview/> (accessed April 14, 2012).

black press weekly. During her extensive career, Bluford challenged racial and gender barriers both inside and outside the newsroom.

Bluford was born on July 1, 1911 in Salisbury, North Carolina, to John Henry Bluford Sr. and Viola Harris Bluford. When Lucile was four, her mother died. Three years later her father remarried and relocated the family to Kansas City, Missouri. Young Lucile refused to move and chose to stay and be raised by her grandmother. Upon her grandmother's death, Bluford, 10, moved to Kansas City to live with her father, stepmother and two brothers. This move proved a lasting one as she spent the rest of her life working, advocating and protesting in Kansas City. So influential was Bluford's life work in the area that ultimately she was referred to as the "conscience of Kansas City."¹⁷

In North Carolina, the young Bluford cultivated her love of reading. In Missouri she groomed her love of writing. At the behest of her high school English teacher, Trussie Smothers, Bluford started writing for the school's yearbook and newspaper. Graduating from Lincoln High School with honors in 1928, she went on to pursue a journalism degree at Kansas University (now the University of Kansas). As only the second African-American woman to graduate in journalism at Kansas University, Bluford lauded her predecessor, Marie Ross, who paved the way for her.¹⁸

In the summers during college, Bluford interned at the *Kansas City Call*, where she worked and was mentored under famed journalists Chester A. Franklin and Roy Wilkins.¹⁹

¹⁷ Pam Johnson, "The Unforgettable Miss Bluford," *Poynter*, February 23, 2004, <http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/leadership-management/what-great-bosses-know/21161/the-unforgettable-miss-bluford/> (accessed March 16, 2011).

¹⁸ Lucile Bluford, interview by Fern Ingersoll, *Women in Journalism* (May 13, 1989).

¹⁹ NAACP, s.v. "NAACP History: Roy Wilkins," <http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history-Roy-Wilkins> (accessed on March 16, 2011). "Roy Wilkins (August 30, 1901 - September 8, 1981) was a prominent civil rights activist in the United States from the 1930s to the 1970s. He worked as a journalist at *The Minnesota*

Recognizing Bluford's talent and dedication, Franklin, editor and publisher of the *Call*, offered her a full-time reporting job when she finished school. Bluford instead chose a brief stint at two other black press papers, *The Word* and the *Kansas City American*, but returned to the *Call* in 1933, where her career flourished.

Early on at the *Call*, Bluford worked as a police beat reporter and photographer. When managing editor Roy Wilkins left the paper in 1937, Bluford, only four years out of college, was promoted to fill his position at age 26. Bluford continued to work her way up the *Call*'s managerial ladder; during Chester Franklin's last years with the paper, Bluford helped write his editorials. Upon Franklin's death in 1955, she took over as publisher and part owner of the *Call*, where she stayed for 40 more years.

Chester A. Franklin, Bluford's Boss, Mentor and Friend. Chester A. Franklin was known for his "free of gossip and tabloid sensation" journalistic standards. Even today the *Call* recognizes and adheres to Franklin's original ideals and states on the paper's website: "[F]rom the *Call*'s inception, news policy has been constructive, presenting the achievements and worthwhile happenings among the African-American community, rather than crime or other stereotypical aspects of the news."²⁰

Franklin learned the business from his father, George F. Franklin, who had been publisher of the *Star* in Denver, Colorado. As his father's health declined, the younger Franklin, 17, along with his mother, Carla Franklin, took over the family's newspaper.

Daily and became editor of *St. Paul Appeal*, an African-American newspaper. After he graduated he became the editor of the *Kansas City Call*. In 1950, Wilkins, along with A. Philip Randolph, founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and Arnold Aronson, a leader of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, founded the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR). LCCR has become the premier civil rights coalition, and has coordinated the national legislative campaign on behalf of every major civil rights law since 1957."

²⁰ Donna Stewart, "About the Call," *The Call, Kansas City Call Newspaper Anniversary Issues from 1938, 1959, 1979 and 1989*. <http://www.kccall.com/about.php> (accessed March 16, 2011).

Shortly after his father's death, Franklin moved to Kansas City because of the larger black population. Franklin and his mother produced the first four-page edition of the *Kansas City Call* on May 6, 1919. "Mother Franklin," as she was affectionately called, worked by selling subscriptions and delivering newspapers. Franklin, shunned by the local printers union, learned to run his own linotype machine.

As hard as the first years were, the Franklins managed to make the *Kansas City Call* a success. It was the only one of 22 newspapers in Kansas City at the beginning of the 20th Century to survive past 1943 and is still published today. When Chester A. Franklin died in 1955 he turned over ownership to both Lucile Bluford and his wife, Ada Crogman Franklin. Bluford also became editor in chief, where she stayed until several years before her death in 2003.

Francis Murphy: A Newspaper Scion

Frances L. Murphy, knew what it was like growing up in a “family focused on a newspaper.”²¹ Both Murphy’s grandfather and father were editors and publishers of the premiere black newspaper, the Baltimore *Afro-American*, nicknamed the *Afro*. Newspaper grooming started early in the Murphy household, and by the age of five Francis quietly sat through newspaper board meetings. By age 30, she was the first woman publisher and editor of the newspaper.²²

Born on October 8, 1922, the year of her grandfather’s death, Francis was the youngest of the five Murphy girls. The Murphy parents had high expectations for their five daughters. Francis’ father, Carl Murphy, had earned a Master’s degree from Harvard University and her mother, Vashti Turley Murphy, co-founded the black sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, Inc. Francis was expected to excel in school as well as participate in the family’s newspaper business. In living up to her family’s high standards, Murphy did well in school (valedictorian of her junior class) and took an active part in the newspaper throughout her childhood, adolescence and adult life.

She graduated from Baltimore’s Douglass High School in 1940 and received her Bachelor’s degree in Journalism at the University of Wisconsin in 1944. After her graduation she worked at the *Afro* as a full time reporter. Twelve years later in 1955, she has successfully worked her way up from beat reporter to magazine editor and picture editor to branch/city editor of the *Baltimore Afro-American*.

²¹ Francis L. Murphy, interview by Fern Ingersoll, *Women In Journalism*, (October 25, 1991), 3.

²² James Wright, "Frances Murphy II, A Black Media Institution, Passes at 85," *Washington Afro-American*, November 26, 2007.

Murphy earned her second bachelor's in Education at Coppin State Teacher's College in 1958. As a newly single mother of two children, she took a self-imposed hiatus from the *Afro* and went to teach in Baltimore's public school system, where she could keep the same hours as her children. While teaching full time, Murphy earned a master's degree in education at Johns Hopkins University. She was one of the first African Americans to graduate from the school that had previously rejected her father's admission on grounds of race.

After earning the master's, Murphy began teaching at Morgan State, an historically black college. For much of the rest of her career, Murphy juggled her love of teaching and her obligations to the *Afro*. In the last 40 years of her life she was either teaching or working in the newsroom and often both.

Much like Bluford, Murphy's life cannot be fully understood without a brief discussion of the newspaper that grounded her life and work. The Baltimore *Afro-American* was the result of the desire of the Murphy family to have their voices and those of their community represented in the press. Historian Hayward Farrar's personal account of the *Afro-American* lauded the paper's contributions to black life:

The paper was one of the first things I learned to read. I learned things about the black community I could not have found elsewhere. For me the *Afro-American* was a window into the world of black Baltimore. It provided visibility for a people rendered invisible by centuries of racial oppression. Indeed, it influenced and changed the world it described to others.²³

The first four-column issue of the *Afro-American* was published on August 13, 1892. Off to a tenuous start, the *Afro-American* had two different owners and declared bankruptcy in its first four years of circulation. The paper, heading in a downward

²³ Hayward Ferrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American: 1892-1950* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), ix.

spiral, was auctioned in 1897. Francis' grandfather, John L. Murphy Sr., the foreman and manager for the paper, witnessed the numerous setbacks of the paper. In an effort to resuscitate the paper, Murphy Sr. borrowed money from his wife and bought the paper for \$200. His leadership resurrected the *Afro-American* and turned it into a family franchise that flourished.

The financial risks taken by both of Francis' grandparents helped establish a history of Murphy's entrepreneurship and resilience. Murphy Sr., the son of slaves and born into slavery, gained his freedom by fighting in the Civil War. While working in a series of varied blue-collar jobs, John Murphy tried to gain entrance to the newspaper business but prior to his ownership of the *Afro* had failed at two local newspaper ventures. His third and final attempt, the purchase of the *Afro*, proved a lasting success that he characterized as the "one thing I didn't fail in."²⁴ Prior to his death, John asked his son, Carl, to take over management of the newspaper. Francis reminisced about her grandfather and his progressive nature:

My grandfather was a fair man as far as women were concerned. He left the stock of the Afro-American newspapers in equal shares to women as well as men. Every single person, every one of his ten children, got an equal share of the four hundred shares of stock that were outstanding at the time. That was interesting to me, that here's a man dying back in 1922, who is determined that the women in his family, as well as the men [have equal shares]. He didn't pick out the oldest son but he gave it to everyone.²⁵

Carl Murphy, Francis' father, held a Bachelor's degree from Howard University and a Master's degree in German Studies from Harvard University. Of his nine siblings, Carl initially had the least to do with the newspaper business—mostly

²⁴ Hayward Ferrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American: 1892-1950* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), ix.

²⁵ Francis L. Murphy, interview by Fern Ingersoll, , *Women In Journalism*, (October 25, 1991), 4.

sporadic articles from his studies abroad in Germany. With failing health and an urge to solidify his business, John Murphy Sr. requested that Carl return home from Germany. Carl quickly reunited with his family and upon his father's death was unanimously chosen to head the *Afro*.

A wise choice, Carl guided the paper into an era of social advocacy and increased circulation. When Francis began her leadership of the paper in 1970, she made sure to maintain the high standards established by her grandfather and father.

Dorothy Gilliam: A Newspaper Pioneer

Dorothy Gilliam started her journalism career at age 15 working as a typist for the *Louisville Defender*, a black press paper. By age 17, she was named the society editor for paper. The following ten years of Gilliam's career were spent working for the black press as she covered a wide swath of topics from fashion to pivotal Civil Rights protests. Simultaneously she pursued her education and attended four colleges before she earned her Master's degree in journalism from Columbia University in 1961. She then joined the *Washington Post* as a full-time reporter, making her the first African-American woman reporter there. During her more than 30 years with the *Post*, she worked as a beat reporter, assistant editor and a columnist. In addition to her day job as a journalist, Gilliam also authored a biography on Paul Robeson, served as president of NABJ (National Association of Black Journalists) and spearheaded a project designed to help high schools develop journalism programs.²⁶

²⁶ Lincoln University, "Lincoln University Dream Recipient: Washington DC Chapter—Hall of Fame and Distinguished Alumni Members," <http://www.lumoalumni-washdc.org/Dream%20Recipients/Dorothy%20Butler%20Gilliam.htm> (accessed March 16, 2011).

Born on November 24, 1939, Gilliam is the youngest and the sole surviving journalist in this study. Her father, Adee Butler, was an A.M.E minister and her mother, Jessie Mae Butler, was a domestic worker. Early in her adolescence, Gilliam's father died, leaving her mother with the responsibility of raising five of their eight surviving children. Gilliam remembers eating to hide the grief of her father's death and excelling in school as a way of proving herself.

Her oral history interview with the Washington Press Club was not completed. In the words of her interviewer, Donita Moorhus, "Demands on Dorothy's time increased significantly after her election as president of the National Association of Black Journalists. With her heavy travel and speaking schedule, we were unable to schedule a final interview session to discuss in detail Dorothy's activities, the environment at the *Washington Post*, and the tumultuous events in Washington, D.C., during the 1980s."²⁷ Fortunately, I was able to conduct a phone interview with Gilliam that allowed us to pursue the areas not fully covered by Morrhus.

²⁷ Washington Press Club Foundation. "Dorothy Gilliam Introduction." <http://www.wpcf.org/oralhistory/gillint.html> (accessed March 16, 2011).

Chapter 2:

Oral History Methodology

“Oral history is not necessarily an instrument for change; it depends upon the spirit in which it is used. Nevertheless, oral history certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and purpose of history.”--Paul Thompson²⁸

In-depth interviews with each of the three black women journalists focused on in this project are in the archives of the Washington Press Club, as part of their extensive oral history project, *Women in Journalism*. The *Women in Journalism* project began in 1986 and includes interviews with more than 50 female journalists who made “significant contributions to society through journalism since the 1920s.”²⁹ Eight of those interviewed are African-American. The women who were interviewed worked in three historical periods: (1) prior to 1942, (2) between the beginning of World War II and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and (3) after 1964.³⁰

²⁸ Thompson, Paul. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3.

²⁹ Washington Press Club Foundation, "Women in Journalism Oral History Project of the Washington Press Club," <http://wpcf.org/oralhistory/ohhome.html> (accessed May 15, 2008, 2008).

³⁰Ibid.

This dissertation focuses on three black women print journalists who began their careers in the second period.³¹ These three women were chosen because they were African-American newspaper journalists working during the Civil Rights Movement and had not been extensively studied by Streitmatter, Broussard, or other journalism historians. Murphy, Gilliam, and Bluford were also chosen because of their different career trajectories. Frances L. Murphy's reign as the owner and editor of the long standing *Afro-American* newspaper creates a distinct look at black-centered advocacy writing during the Civil Rights era. In contrast, Dorothy Gilliam migrated from the black press to the noted mainstream paper, the *Washington Post*, and became its first black female editor. Lucile Bluford battled for racial equity in the ranks of journalism education and contested the University of Missouri's segregated admittance policies.³²

Fern Ingersoll conducted a total of twelve interviews, six each, with Murphy and Bluford. Ingersoll, an experienced oral historian with nearly 50 years of interviewing experience, previously headed numerous oral history projects and interviewed three women journalists for the Press Club project.³³ Ingersoll's interview with Bluford produced a 190-page transcript. Murphy was interviewed on six occasions in 1991 and 1992, producing more than 130 pages of online transcription.

³¹ The other five black women journalists included in the Press Club's project were: Marvel Cooke, Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Ethel Payne, Carolee Simpson, and Belva Davis. Cooke, Hunter-Gault and Payne are included in Streitmatter's research. Simpson and Davis worked in television and radio.

³² The Foundation provided online access to Murphy and Gilliam's interviews. Bluford's interviews can be found at 30 university repositories including Wilson Library at UNC-Chapel Hill.

³³ Washington Press Club, "WPCF Oral History Project: Women in Journalism, Interviewer Bios," Washington Press club, <http://wpcf.org/oralhistory/bios.html#top> (accessed May 15, 2008, 2008).

Donita Moorhus interviewed Dorothy Gilliam six times during late 1992 and throughout 1993 to accumulate approximately 130 pages of transcripts. Donita Moorhus is an oral historian and writer; her previous interview experience was with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In the interviews the women were routinely asked the same opening questions. The interviewers asked about early life and childhood, education, journalism beginnings and subsequent career choices. After the initial questioning, the interviews followed the woman's responses to the questions about her journalism career.

Oral History as a Method

Oral histories can aid in uncovering the stories of the past. Oral historian and author of *Ophelia and Me*, Martha Goodson, noted that her oral history research with former slaves sparked her interest in what was being omitted from history texts.³⁴ In concordance, oral historians Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai advocate oral history because it often acts as an historical equalizer by offering a counter narrative to the more traditional chronicles of American history. They contend that oral history affords the disenfranchised a chance to tell their side of the story and shed new light on how events transpired. In their book, *Women's Words*, Gluck and Patai detail the importance of oral history in preserving women's experiences and suggest that history is incomplete if it fails to offer different angles/perspectives to any given story.³⁵

³⁴ Martha Graham Goodson, "Ophelia and me: Tribute to an Early Narrative Researcher," in *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women*, ed. K. Vaz (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 7-23.

³⁵ Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1-7.

It is also important to acknowledge the potential biases of oral accounts. According to oral history scholar Michael Frisch, the human memory has inherent limitations. In his book, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral History and Public History*, Frisch encourages oral historians to be mindful of the drawbacks. One potential problem of oral history accounts is the tendency of the individual who is recounting her life to categorize events and then retell them as though they happened in succession.³⁶ Interviewees may have a tendency to impose a narrative structure on their lives in an attempt to understand their lives in hindsight. People link events in a way that makes their experience seem more coherent and thematically organized than it actually was. It is not that these experiences did not occur or provide any less validity to an account, but the sequencing may be distorted or inaccurate. In addition, oral historians should recognize that incidents and experiences could be more or less emphasized based on the person's perception of what is valued in the present.

Bearing the limitations of this method in mind, this research attempts to convey the most accurate historical analysis of these three black women journalists possible based on their own stories and other historical documents. Documents and written records were used jointly with the interviews to provide a methodologically collaborative approach. Each journalist's writings were analyzed to create a more detailed picture of the journalists' perspectives. Many of their newspaper articles were accessible in the newspaper archives at UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke University libraries. For further support, secondary sources such as biographies, journal articles, and books describing the time period were used to develop a historical context.

³⁶ Micheal Frish, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State of University of New York Press, 1990), 15-28.

By combining these resources, this project focuses on understanding how Murphy, Gilliam, and Bluford empowered themselves for resistance during the Civil Rights era.

Reflexivity: My Part of This History

Reflexivity is an important part of oral history analysis because it allows the researcher and/or interviewer to address their personal influence on the research and analysis. Oral historian, Valerie Yow, has written about the importance of reflexivity in oral history methodology. Yow argues that “the motives for doing the project, feelings about the narrator, interviewer’s reaction to the narrator’s testimony, and intrusion of the interviewer’s assumptions and of the interviewer’s self-schema”³⁷ impact the interpretation and practice of oral histories. By detailing my own feelings and motives behind this research, I acknowledge that these factors can and do contribute to how I conducted and analyzed these interviews.

In 2001 I started my first reporting job at The Syracuse (NY) *Post-Standard*. I was first assigned to the city desk to work under Mike Grogan, a well-respected editor. The newsroom housed more than 200 reporters and staff. On my first day I was given a brief tour, introduced to my cubicle mate and promptly given my first assignment. I was nervous and even though I had graduated with a degree in newspaper journalism, I didn’t know where to begin.

I looked around the newsroom looking for a possible ally and mentor. In truth, I was searching for anyone who could offer advice because I was too embarrassed to ask my editor. I looked to my left and found my cubicle colleague deeply engaged in a project, so, I looked around the newsroom and spotted another African-American female journalist to whom I

³⁷ Valerie Yow, “ ‘Do I Like Them Much?’: Effects of the Oral History Interview and Vice Versa,” *The Oral History Review*, 24, no. 1 (1997): 55.

introduced myself. She smiled and welcomed me to the paper. I was grateful and relieved when she offered to be of assistance.

In those beginning months at the *Post Standard*, this woman's friendship proved invaluable. When I came to her crying after my first harsh edit, she told me of her own brush with brutal editing. She informed me about my editor; he was hard but fair. She taught me how to look at my stories from different angles. She encouraged me. She took me to lunch on occasion and often came by to check on me. Several weeks later, I met the only other black female journalist at the paper and she, too, took me under her wing. When a local merchant mistreated me, she warned me not to frequent that establishment because they had a history of racism.

I relied on these two women. By befriending and guiding me they warded off feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and isolation. In the years following this initial journalism experience, I wondered how other black women journalists have dealt with predominantly white, male dominated newsrooms. I wanted to know how they survived in what I saw as an isolating profession.

Thus, I chose this research project because I was interested in how black women journalists survived in the newsrooms of earlier eras. I thought that by studying my fore-sisters, I would find some of the answers to the feelings I felt in my first job as an African-American female journalist. A graduate seminar on the history of journalism deepened my desire because I saw the gap in history left by the untold stories of black female journalists. I came to this project seeking my own answers and with a desire to pay homage to the ones who came before me.

I found my answers through these women's stories. This project helped me make sense of my days at the *Post-Standard* and helped me see that I am not alone in trying to answer the myriad of questions I face as a woman of color. It was humbling yet invigorating to find answers while illuminating these remarkable women's contributions to an important period in the lives of all African Americans.

One of the wonderful aspects of oral history research is that the researcher is encouraged to connect with the participants and to use their experiences to inform and influence their project.³⁸ With this perspective in mind, I did not try to maintain a distance when reading the women's transcripts. My goal was just the opposite. As I wanted to fully understand these women's experiences I let their life stories envelope me and draw me closer to them as women and journalists. I felt that I needed to try to understand and empathize with these women as much as possible to accurately tell their life stories. Thus, my goal was to decrease the distance between my story and theirs.

Analysis of the Interview Transcripts and Newspaper Articles

I initially read each transcript like a novel. To do that, I printed off the interviews for each woman and had them bound as one book. Each had a cover with the woman's picture and dates of all the interviews. On my first read, I refrained from taking notes and just tried to get a good feel for each woman and her life. On the second read I started to highlight significant quotes and experiences. By the third read I began to more precisely code the transcripts. I used initials to signify the five empowerment concepts (described in more detail

³⁸ Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 734.

in Chapter Three): **SD**= Self Determination; **SDF**= Self Definition; **V**= Voice; **CC**=Connection to Community; **SRV**= Spiritual Regeneration and Rejuvenation.

In the margins were also included insights, questions, and observations that were not fully answered by Black Feminist Theory.

On subsequent readings, I used a spiral binder to chronologically map out each woman's life. As I reread the interviews, I transferred my marginal notes in the interviews to the notebook. I created another code for my notebook notes. First, I wrote down the page number, then the observed empowerment trait and a brief description of the quote or experience. For example, in Francis Murphy's interview I liked how she talked about her father, so I made note of it in the spiral binder. The note read:

3-SDF: learned lessons from her father [QQ]. 3= page number; **SDF**= self-definition trait; A brief description; **[QQ]**= Quotable Quote.

By the time I started writing, I had read and reread the transcriptions many times and had taken copious notes. The process of rereading and note-taking on each interview allowed me to write my analyses in an organic manner; I felt like I knew each woman as best as I could from their interviews. I tried to let the women speak for themselves as much as possible while still noting my thoughts and observations. While reading the transcripts I noticed that self-determination and self-definition were by far the most prominent traits exhibited in the women's lives. At times it was difficult to clearly distinguish between the two traits so I rewrote Patricia Parker's definitions for these two traits to be clear about the distinctions. It became apparent that self-determination was the most frequently represented trait in the interviews, followed by self-definition. Spiritual regeneration and rejuvenation was the least apparent trait and for that reason I made sure to ask about it when I had the

opportunity to interview Dorothy Gilliam. I also noticed that connection to community and voice were less evident in the oral histories. That puzzled me because I knew these women had exhibited those forms of empowerment but they were not easily recognized in the interviews. I soon saw, however, that the characteristics were clearly visible in the women's written works (columns and editorials).

As I read through the years of the women's writings, I took note of the 10 to 15 topics that appeared most frequently. I then narrowed those topics to the top five and coded those with colored tabs. I could then count which were the most frequent topics and organized the chapters with the frequency of themes in mind.

Chapter Overview

The findings from this analysis strategy are presented in two parts: (1) the lives of the women as seen through the lens of black feminist theory, and (2) the issues and ideas the women focused on in their writing from the perspective of alternative and ethnic media theory.

Chapter Three, *The Historical Legacy of Black Women's Survival and Resistance*, consists of an overview of the history of black American women's survival tactics, black press history, alternative and ethnic media theories, resistant women journalists, and black feminist theory.

Chapter Four, *Black Feminist Theory in the Lives of Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam*, is a discussion of how the five themes of black women's empowerment and resistance (self-defined, self-determined, voice, spiritual regeneration/rejuvenation, and connection to community) can be seen in the lives of Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam.

Chapter Five, *Black Ink*, is an examination of how the newspaper articles written by Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam display the characteristics/functions suggested by alternative and ethnic media theories.

Chapter Six, *Echoes of the Past, Now Heard in the Present*, is a discussion of how notions of empowerment and resistance in black feminist theory are exemplified in the lives of Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam. This chapter also synthesizes the project's findings and suggests areas that could benefit from future research and study.

Chapter 3:
The Historical Legacy of Black Women's Survival and Resistance

"History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again." --Maya Angelou

The history of American black women is one of survival that contains valuable stories of resistance and empowerment. These stories are crucial to understanding the lives of black women then and now. To better understand the women in this research project, a discussion of how the study of the past shapes present knowledge is necessary. The history of black women in America shows how race and gender have been muted, contorted, forged and reborn. In the words of historian Darlene Clark Hine, "...the history of black women in America possesses elements shared by people of all colors and national origins, especially those who have experienced marginalization, exploitation, and oppression."³⁹

A long history of oppression and the survival tactics employed by black women in their efforts to survive can be traced across centuries. The struggles and the triumphs of Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam are a part of a rich history of defiance and tenacity. It is impossible to discuss their lives without acknowledging and paying tribute to their ancestors.

³⁹ Darlene Clark Hine, "Preface," in *Black Women In American*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, (Oxford University Press, 2005), xvii.

Slave Survival Amid A Cultural Castration (1661-1863)

In 1619, the first African female slave, “Angela,” arrived on American soil.⁴⁰ In the following two centuries thousands of Black women were deracinated from their homelands and forced into lives of servitude. The social, physical, and emotional manacles of slavery were designed to degrade and destroy. As slaves, black women were subjected to a system designed to obliterate their traditional roles and worth as women. In their book, *A Shining Thread of Hope*, historians Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson further explain the effects of slavery on black women: “In both the African cultures from which black women came and the American culture into which they were transplanted, a woman’s identity was bound up in and even defined by their familial roles. Her sense of self depended on fulfilling those roles, and many of the early enslaved black women were robbed of the opportunity to do so.”⁴¹

In surviving slavery, black women forged their lives as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters despite the oppressive slave regime. Slavery, in one aspect, symbolically castrated its slaves with the goal to advance the dominant ideology that both black men and black women were simply chattel, androgynous personal property. Under centuries of this shared subjugation, black female and male slaves lived under a system that did not distinguish between the two genders when doling out castigation and workload. Political activist and philosopher Angela Davis articulates the results of the slave system’s attempt at gender neutrality:

⁴⁰ Darlene Clark Hine, “Slavery,” in *Black Women In America*, ed. Dorothy Clark Hine, 132 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁴¹ Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope* (Broadway, New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 51.

Black women were equal to their men in the oppression they suffered; (*during slavery*) they were their men's social equals within the slave community; they resisted slavery with a passion equal to their men's. This was one of the greatest ironies of the slave system, for in subjecting women to the most ruthless exploitation conceivable, exploitation which knew no sex distinctions, the groundwork was created not only for Black women to assert their equality through their social situations, but also to express it through their acts of resistance.⁴²

A Slave Women's Harsher Plight

Thus, while the slave system aimed to crush the spirit of both male and female blacks by de-gendering their lives, it inadvertently catalyzed a unisexual resolve to resist. In the words of Harriet Jacobs, an escaped slave, "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded (sic) to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and suffering, and mortifications peculiarly their own."⁴³ Davis also notes that black slaves, both male and female, were subject to a system built on equal opportunity at exploitation, black women had to endure additional violence and sexual abuse: "the punishment afflicted on women exceeded in intensity the punishment suffered by their men, for women were not only whipped and mutilated, they were also *raped*."⁴⁴

Historian Evelyn Higginbotham adds, "Black Women experienced the vicissitudes of slavery through gendered lives and thus differently from slave men. They bore and nursed children and performed domestic duties--all on top of doing fieldwork."⁴⁵ Slave women also disproportionately suffered from the hardships of marriage and motherhood within the slave system. The mandated separation of mothers and wives

⁴² Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York, New York: Random House, 1983), 24.

⁴³ Jacobs, Harriet, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*, 2 (Stilwell, Kansas: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005).

⁴⁴ Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*. 24.

⁴⁵ Evelyn Higginbotham, "The Metalanguage of Race and Gender," in *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History*, 48 (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, 1995).

from their husbands and children is what Hine called “the most heart wrenching problem adult slave women faced.”⁴⁶ Hine calls this forced separation “a kind of sacrifice, like no other” that “defined slavery for slave women.”⁴⁷ So great was this burden, that many female runaways were in fact fleeing to their estranged families in an effort to be with them or include them in their efforts to escape.⁴⁸

Slave Survival as Resistance

Slavery thus created a paradigm specific to black women; their experience, a byproduct of both racial and gender oppression, established an explicit black women’s standpoint apart from male slaves. The atrocities of slavery gave rise to resistance. The hardships of slavery on black women fostered distinctive forms of resistance. Black feminist theorist Patricia Collins contends that for black women, “survival was a form of resistance.”⁴⁹ In their efforts to survive and resist, black female slaves “ran away, refused to maintain certain work quotas, talked back to authority figures, stole food, met secretly with other slaves, plotted against masters, and brought whites physical harm.”⁵⁰ In one account, Celia, a 19-year-old Missouri slave, failed for five years to thwart her master’s attempts to rape her. In her final refusal and while already pregnant with his child, she

⁴⁶ Darlene Clark Hine, *Slavery*, Vol. 3, in *Black Women In America*, ed. Dorothy Clark Hine, 148 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, ed. 10th Anniversary Edition, 201 (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁵⁰ Darlene Clark Hine, *Slavery*, 146.

killed him, dismembered his body and burned it in a fireplace. She stood trial for his murder in 1855 and was sentenced to hang. She was hanged only a few days later.⁵¹

While Celia's act may seem like a drastic example of resistance, there was nothing small about the resistance of slave women, for every offense against the system was punishable. "Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of slave women were sold because of such acts of resistance. Many more received corporal punishment on a daily basis."⁵² Despite the threats of physical castigation and removal, slave women continued to resist. In slave records, slave women were accused of: malingering, stealing, mistreating the master's children, aiding and abetting runaways, poisoning, and writing illegal passes.⁵³

Surviving Reconstruction and Jim Crow, 1863-1950s

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the end of the Civil War in 1865 did little to "free" slaves as America's politics conspired to usher in a modified version of Black slavery. With the death of President Abraham Lincoln in 1865, former vice-president Andrew Johnson, a Southern slaveholder, began his term as president. Showing his true loyalties, Johnson advocated for former Confederates to regain political control of the South. In so doing, President Johnson endorsed the ideals of slavery by allowing racist policies to survive in local and state governments. While former Confederate politicians may have conceded to their loss of the war, they were not reconciled to the loss of their slaves and unwilling to relinquish the placement of blacks as second-class citizens. Hine wrote, "Loath to forfeit their white supremacy, whites instituted the

⁵¹ Melton A. McLaurin, *Celia, A Slave* (New York: Avon Books, 1993).

⁵² Darlene Clark Hine, "Slavery," 146.

⁵³ Ibid.

systematic abridgement of black rights through fraud, terror, intimidation, and the perversion of the electoral, and judicial system.”⁵⁴

Unfortunately, with President Johnson at the helm, the federal government did not answer the cries of its newest citizens. The period known as Reconstruction, 1865-1877, did little to reconstruct the lives of black Americans. And for black women, “that meant they would continue to suffer much of the same vilification and abuse endured while enslaved.”⁵⁵ Hine, however, believes that being unheard and unseen by the government taught black women “a valuable lesson about self-determination” because they learned to persevere despite the apparent setbacks and obstacles.⁵⁶

While Reconstruction served to reestablish the presiding racist ideology toward blacks, the subsequent Jim Crow era, 1861-1950, cemented injustice by supporting the policing of blacks through the violent practices of lynching in efforts to keep “blacks in line” and compliant.⁵⁷ According to historian William Chafe, “the so-called Jim Crow era, was in fact, a combination of de facto second-class citizenship and racial separation.”⁵⁸ In direct response to the travesties of lynching plaguing their community, coupled with the government’s apathy, black men and women continued to reinvent, hone and adjust their resistance strategies.

⁵⁴ Darlene Clark Hine, “Jim Crow” in *Black Women in America*, 32 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵⁵ Hine, “Jim Crow,” 32.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ The Jim Crow period is named after a 1830s minstrel song and dance show. The catchy song, “Weel about and turn about and do jis so, Eb'ry time I weel about I jump Jim Crow” quickly became associated with blacks and their simultaneous accommodated yet ostracized societal placement.

⁵⁸ Raymond Gavins, Robert Korstad, William H. Chafe, ed., *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans tell about life in the segregated South*, xxvi (New York: New Press, 2001).

Emerging Resistant Strategies in Reconstruction and Jim Crow

While slavery prohibited the formal organization of blacks, emancipation did give blacks the ability to publicly organize. Black women mobilized to create formal organizations. Organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), established in 1896, labored diligently to address the injustices of Jim Crow. Established and managed primarily by black professional women, the organization initially focused on desegregation and black women's self-development. The NACW was a testament to the tenacity of its founders and members, because a majority of black women were not allowed much, if any, professional mobility outside of farm and field or domestic service.⁵⁹ Female dominated professions at that time were limited to teaching, nursing, social work, and librarianship.⁶⁰

While the rise of black professional organizations and employment aided in severing the unjust tentacles of Jim Crow, black churches were also important vehicles for resistance and activism. In *Righteous Discontent*, Evelyn Higginbotham argues that black women's participation in their churches had the biggest impact on the fight for equality during the Jim Crow period: "[B]lack women were crucial to broadening the public arm of the church and making it the most powerful institution of racial self-help in the African-American community. During these years, (1880-1920), the church served as the most effective vehicle by which men and women alike, pushed down by racism and

⁵⁹ Hine, "Jim Crow," 36.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

poverty, regrouped and rallied against emotional and physical defeat.”⁶¹ Through their churches, black women fought for voting rights, anti-lynching legislation, the abolishment of segregation laws, educational opportunities and addressed issues of gender discrimination in the black community.⁶²

The Black Church's Role in Resistance and Journalism

Since its inception in the early days of slavery, the church “constituted the backbone of the black community.”⁶³ In *Righteous Discontent*, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham argues the historical importance the black church because “it provided a spiritual cohesiveness that permitted its people to absorb, interpret, and practice the Christian faith--to make it their own.”⁶⁴ While white slave owners manipulated the contents of Christianity to endorse and excuse slavery, black slaves interpreted Christianity to favor their standpoint, a “remarkable display of resistant triumph for enslaved blacks.”⁶⁵

From its embryonic stages, the black church subversively espoused insurgent tenets oppositional to the dominant Christian theology of their enslavers. Famed abolitionist and ex-slave Frederick Douglass explained how white Americans corrupted Christianity for their own benefit. In 1845, he wrote, “I mean strictly to apply to the

⁶¹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920," 1 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁶² Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005). In this book Goldenberg discusses how white, American based Christianity used the Biblical story of Ham to justify the enslavement of Africans, supposed descendents of Ham.

slaveholding religion of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper; for between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference...Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels.”⁶⁶

In reinterpreting and preaching a pro-black Christian dogma, black Americans boldly carved out a confluence of religion and resistance. As Higginbotham put it: “In the decades following Reconstruction, the church’s autonomy and financial strength made it the most logical institution for the pursuit of racial self-help. It functioned not only as a house of worship but as an agency of social control, forum of discussion and debate, promoter of education and economic cooperation, and arena for the development and assertion of leadership.”⁶⁷

The black church laid vital groundwork for the making of civil rights activists. Within the church, black women expanded their personal power and exerted their equality. Black women, throughout the previous centuries, toiled and revolted alongside their men, in the fields and in the churches. They too, along with their men, bore the weight of injustice and refused to be relegated to silence, inactivity, or blind consent even in matters of religion. As Hine notes, “It is irrelevant that some of the churches opposed their political actions. They had also been disagreeing with the preacher, in the name of

⁶⁶*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 1st American edition, published by Massachusetts Anti-Slave Society in Boston, 1845.

⁶⁷ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 5.

God, for a very long time. Inside the church or out, black women carried more than their share of the load and felt entitled to make up their own minds.”⁶⁸

Black women writers recognized the power of religion and were not opposed to brandishing Biblical prose in pursuit of their racial and gender initiatives. In constructing their written and spoken words of reform, black women often wove their arguments around the ecclesiastical canon. Most black women journalists started their writing careers by working for black church publications, arguably one of the precursors to the black press. The abolitionist journalist Maria W. Stewart built her entire anti-slavery campaign on the Bible, comparing the United States to the wicked Babylon.⁶⁹ In her signature piece, “A Woman’s Mission,” Ida B. Wells advocated for the equality of women, by referencing the stories of Eve and the Virgin Mary.⁷⁰ The synergy between black women writers and the church proved a formidable partnership.

Civil Rights Era: The Culmination of Lessons Learned from Slavery, Reconstruction and Jim Crow

The collective lessons of resistance drawn from slavery, Reconstruction and Jim Crow would come to serve black women well in the years of the Civil Rights Movement. In historical hindsight, the tactics black women had accumulated through centuries of oppression were all masterfully wielded in the Civil Rights Movement. From slavery black women learned discretion and survival. As Hine asserts, “black women in the

⁶⁸ Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *Shining Thread of Hope* (Broadway, NY: Random House, 2005), 268.

⁶⁹ Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 18.

⁷⁰ Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions* (New York: Amistad HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 86.

1930s and 1960s knew how to organize, were accustomed to working together, and felt a strong kinship with members of the community beyond their immediate families. The church and community work in which they have been involved for two centuries--and especially in the 60 years before the Civil Right Movement--made them ideal political activists.”⁷¹

What remains understudied is the power black women wielded as journalists. Darlene Clark Hine wrote, “not sufficiently noted among black women’s tools were the press.” Black women capitalized on the power of the press to strengthen the reach of their resistance and activism. In the encyclopedia of *Black Women in America*, Hine pays homage to the work of black women journalists and their efforts in spotlighting and abolishing the injustices of Jim Crow. “They wrote. They edited. They were owners and operators. They made public policy and every aspect of Jim Crow a daily fare. They gave voice to rights and wrongs. They tore into stereotypes in battling against the abysmal place of both the Negro and the women.”⁷²

Black Press History

The establishment of the black press played an integral role in voicing the concerns of a muted people while simultaneously offering black reporters an entry into newspaper journalism. The black press began with a meeting of black leaders in the home of M. Boston Crummell in 1827. They decided to publish a weekly newspaper for free blacks. According to press historians Armistead Pride and Clint Wilson II, the paper would “be a strictly Negro newspaper. It would be the Negro speaking; it would be

⁷¹ Hine, *Shining Thread of Hope*, 267,-268.

⁷² Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Women in America," in *Jim Crow*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 36.

directed to the Negro's problems. Unlike abolitionist newspapers run by whites with Black assistance, it would be Negro owned and Negro controlled."⁷³

In 1827, the first newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, gave way to hundreds of Negro newspapers aspiring to develop, enhance, and dictate their own news forum. The first editors of *Freedom's Journal*, Samuel Cornish and John Russworm, stated their intentions: "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long have we been misrepresented in things that concern us dearly."⁷⁴

More than a century after its inception, the black press remained the premiere place where a significant number of African-American reporters gained their start in the newspaper world. Renowned African-American journalist Clarence Page describes his attempt at entering the newspaper arena in the 1960s:

When I decided as a high school student that I wanted to be a journalist, the black press offered me something else: a possible career safety net. Unlike my young white friends, I had to prepare myself for the possibility that the same white newspapermen who were eager to have me sell and deliver newspapers in my hometown would not, because of my complexion, hire me to report for those same newspapers. No matter, I assured my worried parents; if the white newspapers wouldn't let me compete, maybe the "colored papers" would give me a chance—as they had Langston Hughes, Louis Lomax, Ida B. Wells, W.E.B. DuBois, and my other black journalistic role models. I held high hopes.⁷⁵

Page's sentiments were similar to the experiences of the black women journalists featured in this research. Each of the African-American women journalists writing in the Civil Rights era gained her first break in black press newspapers—a few would never

⁷³ Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson II, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1997), 9.

⁷⁴ Pamela Newkirk, *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 36.

⁷⁵ Patrick Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voices of Freedom* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), x.

leave. For more than 100 years, black newspapers held the monopoly for representing their own.

Although readership was hard to maintain because of enslavement and low rates of literacy, the initiation of the *Freedom's Journal* paved the way for some 38 more black newspapers before the end of the Civil War in 1865, on average one new black paper a year until emancipation.⁷⁶ The black press continued to serve the black community post emancipation and, according to black press historian Patrick Washburn:

For the remainder of the century, some things about the black press would remain unchanged. Black journalists would continue to write about many of the same themes, and although slavery was gone, lynching would replace it as the new evil that drew the ire of the black press. As for the number of black newspapers, they escalated sharply, but their life expectancy remained short in many cases for lack of circulation, advertising, and money.⁷⁷

In the first half of the 20th Century, the increase in literacy rates and household incomes coupled with the neglect in coverage of black communities in the mainstream press helped stabilize black newspapers. As Washburn writes: "Black newspapers were a necessity if blacks wanted to read about themselves, because white newspapers continued to largely ignore them unless a story involved a criminal activity."⁷⁸

Between World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) the influence of the black press grew stronger, with an estimated readership of more than one half million. Black newspapers continued to speak and fight for the rights of America's disenfranchised black population:⁷⁹ "With the ravages of Jim Crow firmly entrenched as

⁷⁶ Carter R. Bryan, "Negro Journalism in America before Emancipation," *Journalism Monographs* 12 (September 1969): 3-9.

⁷⁷ Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 37.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷⁹ Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 84.

a fact of life at the beginning of the 20th century, Black Americans relied on their own press to chronicle the effects of segregation and racial discrimination and to provide leadership in the struggle to overcome them.”⁸⁰

The Black Press’ Role and Reactions to the Civil Rights Movement

In 1945, black soldiers returning from World War II came home from fighting racism internationally to confronting it domestically. Historians differ on when the Civil Rights Movement actually started or which event should be seen as the catalyst. Journalists Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff suggest that a series of events, not any one in particular set the stage for the fight for black rights. Roberts’ and Klibanoff’s book, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*, meticulously details the events that led to the mainstream press’s realization of the race problem in America. Roberts and Klibanoff argue that racism in America had always been addressed in the black press but it was not until the same racial issues bled into the white press could the civil rights movement develop a national agenda with a collective focus. Roberts and Klibanoff suggest that a series of stories that broke the racial news divide should be seen as the national “white” press awakening to the black struggle. They propose that the movement started as early as 1947 when Jackie Robinson integrated Major League Baseball because “he had become the first running story that the white press joined the black press in covering.”⁸¹

Taking Roberts’ and Klibanoff’s suggestions into account, I will set 1947 as the start date of the Civil Rights Movement at least in the news media. Roberts and Klibanoff

⁸⁰ Pride and Wilson, *A History of the Black Press*, 127.

⁸¹ Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*, 34.

also cite the Emmett Till case⁸² of 1955 as a milestone for white reporters and journalism because it “not only brought Negro reporters into the heart of the white man’s kingdom—the courtroom—but he (Emmett Till) brought white reporters into the Deep South in unprecedented numbers to cover a racial story.”⁸³

Another racial incident further shook the white press from its slumber and forced them to realize the depth of black/white racial unrest. The Watts (CA) riots, a racial uprising in the summer of 1965, had white mainstream papers scurrying to find black reporters able to cover the events. In the hot summer of August 1965, the escalating tensions between police and Watts’ black residents erupted when a white police officer ordered a black man’s (Marquette Frye) car impounded after he allegedly failed to pass a series of field sobriety tests. As onlookers, predominantly black, witnessed the interaction, the white officer, Lee Minikus, refused to let the accused’s brother take the car in lieu of impoundment. Ultimately, officer Minikus arrested Frye along with his brother and mother. The gathering bystanders grew increasingly hostile, in part because just months before in May the neighborhood had also witnessed the murder of a black man at the hands of two Los Angeles police officers. The history of police violence against blacks fed the frustrations of the black spectators/community.⁸⁴ Residents began throwing rocks at Minikus, which escalated into six days of aggression against whites, threatening of police, looting, raiding, and property destruction in the area.

Researcher Anthony Oberschall, posited:

⁸² A 15-year-old black boy from Chicago was brutally lynched in Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a local white woman.

⁸³ Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*, 86.

⁸⁴ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University, 2007).

... that the tension-filled relations between police and Negroes have a structural and situational, as well as a personal origin. The police as the daily visible representative of a white dominated world bears the full brunt of the accumulated frustrations and hostility of the ghetto. Negro attitudes towards police are not merely a reaction to police behavior and attitudes, but to their total situation in the society.⁸⁵

The Watts uprising also led to the formation of the Kerner Commission by then President Lyndon B. Johnson. This Commission, formally known as the National Advisory Council on Civil Disorders, was convened to investigate the reasons behind the racial unrest and ultimately, to find ways of preventing future violent outbreaks.⁸⁶ Of its many findings, the Commission noted that the media's negligence in reportage and negative attitude toward urban and rural poverty contributed to the social unrest.⁸⁷

The Commission's report also included recommendations on how the media could begin to assuage and prevent similar events in the future. The two suggestions relevant to this research were: (1) the addition of more black journalists in the mainstream press, and (2) increased coverage of blacks in news media. The Commission wrote:

The media report and write from a standpoint of a white man's world. The ills of the ghetto, the difficulties of life there, the Negro's burning sense of grievance, are seldom conveyed. Sights and indignities are part of the Negro's daily life, and many of them come from what he (Negro) now calls "the white press"—a press that repeatedly, if unconsciously, reflects the biases, the paternalism, and the indifference of white America.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Anthony Oberschall, "The Los Angeles Riot of 1965," *Social Problems* 15 (1968), 332.

⁸⁶ United States National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *The Kerner Report :The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* [Report], 1st Pantheon ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 513.

⁸⁷ United States National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *The Kerner Report :The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* [Report], 1st Pantheon ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 363.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 366.

Hence, not until these series of racial events/news breaks did the “white press” attempt to cover the racial unrest of the Civil Rights Movement and increasingly realized their need for black journalists. Thus, the mainstream/white press started to recruit black journalists away from black press newsrooms. As media historian Patrick Washburn put it, they “raid(ed) the vast talent they long had ignored in the newsrooms of black newspapers and magazines.”⁸⁹ Many black journalists seized the opportunity to enter the mainstream/white news world.

Due to the depletion of black journalists from black press ranks, the black press was forced to adjust their newsrooms and, perhaps just as importantly, had to acknowledge the relinquishment of their monopoly on black-centered news. The black journalist migration into white newsrooms also affected black journalists because they too had to learn to adapt to a new environment, an often hostile, white-dominated newsroom culture. Arguably black women journalists faced the biggest challenges as they had to contend with both racial and gender divides in the predominantly white, male newsrooms. Their personal stories reveal the obstacles that had to be overcome to succeed in a mainly white newspaper world in a moment of immense importance in the history of race relations in the United States.

Black Press and Black Journalists: Both Alternative and Ethnic Media

All three of the black women journalists featured in this study had extensive careers in the black press. As trained black press journalists they wrote from a distinct perspective and with a specific agenda. A discussion of the function(s) of the black press

⁸⁹ Washburn, *The African American*, x.

helps in understanding why and how these women wrote the way they did. Two overlapping theories help understand the function(s) of the black press--alternative and ethnic media theory.

Alternative Media Theory and Ethnic Media Theory

The black press has been defined as an alternative (or dissident) media source. In her book *The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History*, Lauren Kessler describes key characteristics of alternative media:

They were the underdogs of their time. All held views or believed in ideas that diverged from the mainstream political, economic, social, and cultural climate of their times. All wanted, to some degree, to effect social change. All wanted access to the popular media market place for their ideas or sometimes merely as existence as a group. All were excluded from the conventional market place, although the extent and type of exclusion (denial of access) varied from group to group and over time. In response to this they started media marketplaces of their own.⁹⁰

With its beginnings tracing back almost two centuries, the black press identified black Americans “among the first minority group to create their own media system, independent of the mainstream media market.”⁹¹ As an alternative (or dissident) media source, the black press served several key functions for their community. First, and foremost, the emergence of the black press allowed blacks to see themselves represented, other than in mainstream negative images, in the media. In addition, black newspapers, journals and magazines provided a much-needed reflection for the black community by

⁹⁰ Lauren Kessler, *The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1984), 16.

⁹¹ Mark Slagle, “Mightier than the Sword: The Black Press and the End of Racial Segregation in the U.S. Military, 1948-1954” (PhD. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010), 38.

both exposing the “deplorable conditions of black life”⁹² as well as acknowledging the advancements and successes of their race.

With the weight of their community on their pens, black press editors fought to inform, inspire, unify, and mobilize their readers.⁹³ In his book, *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America*, Rodger Streitmatter refers to dissident press editors as “proactive agents of change” who saw their role as journalists as “not a professional calling for its own sake but a means to reach people with ideas, a way to organize and propagandize for a cause.”⁹⁴ Thus, the black press, as a dissident (or alternative) press, served a two-fold mission: (1) to communicate internally within its community and, (2) to convert or persuade the non-supporters as to the validity of their cause.⁹⁵

Ethnic media theory helps to further define and sort the intragroup writings of black press journalists. The idea of alternative media serves as an umbrella or superordinate category, encompassing any and all non-mainstream media; ethnic media is a more specific kind of alternative media that focuses on ethnic minority/immigrant populations. Hence, the black press fulfills the broader functions of alternative media as well as the more narrowly defined functions of ethnic media.

Black Americans pose an interesting dilemma for ethnic media scholars. According to ethnic media researchers, one of the primary functions of ethnic media is to

⁹² Kessler, *The Dissident Press*, 20.

⁹³ Ibid., 24.

⁹⁴ Rodger Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 56.

⁹⁵ Kessler, *The Dissident Press*, 158.

“preserve and transmit native culture and identity.”⁹⁶ Sadly, one of the egregious byproducts of American slavery was the intentional and violent annihilation of the many diverse African and Island cultures held by slaves. With limited retention of language, customs, food, and the myriad of slave ethnicities eroded into one mass race/identity-- black, American black.⁹⁷ Despite this history, the black press helped fulfill a crucial ethnic media function by uniting all black Americans as one community.

Beside the lack of common geography and culture, the black press and journalists are a good example of ethnic media. According to ethnic media researchers, ethnic media serve their communities in several ways. First, ethnic media serve as a community booster by “presenting the community in a positive light, projecting an image of wholesomeness, success and achievements.”⁹⁸ Features, profiles and success articles are good examples of what can be considered community booster stories.

Ethnic media also serve their communities by “acting as community sentinels, acting as both radars and early warning systems against external threats.”⁹⁹ Stories concerning civil and legal rights, including threats and violations perform the community sentinel/watchdog function. Third, the information function describes media designed to “offer information and mobilize the community.”¹⁰⁰ These stories inform the community about community events and encourage involvement.

⁹⁶ Melissa Johnson, “How Ethnic are U.S. Ethnic Media? The Case of Latina Magazines” *Mass Communication and Society*, 2000, 3(2&3), 233.

⁹⁷ Micheal Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986).

⁹⁸ K. Viswanath and Pamela Arora, “Ethnic Media in the United States: An Essay on Their Role in Integrations, Assimilations, and Social Control” *Mass Communication and Society*, 2000, 3(1), 48.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

While these three functions, community booster, community sentinel/watchdog, and information, are generally seen as examples of intra-group communication, the fourth function, the collective expression function, can be considered both intra and extra-group communication. The function is fulfilled by articles designed to act as “collective expressions of anger at injustice.”¹⁰¹ Stories detailing the frustrations and anger of the community toward the outside community also serve this function.¹⁰²

Bluford’s, Gilliam’s and Murphy’s work reflects the fulfillment of the black press’ role as both alternative media and ethnic media source. Both Lucile Bluford and Francis Murphy served as editors of two prestigious black press papers, *The Call* and *The Afro-American*, respectively. As part of the analysis of their lives I categorized the articles written by these three journalists according to the intended target audience as suggested by alternative/dissident media theory into intra- and extra-group communication. The articles classified as intra-group communication were then analyzed to see which of the three ethnic media functions they best served.

As historian Mark Slagle argues, “black newspapers demanded equal rights, protested racial injustice, challenged ideas of black inferiority, presented positive images of black Americans, and insisted that white America fulfill the nation’s promise of liberty and equality for all.”¹⁰³ Bluford’s, Gilliam’s and Murphy’s work aids in further understanding the dual role of the black press as both alternative and ethnic media.

¹⁰¹ Melissa Johnson, “How Ethnic are U.S. Ethnic Media? The Case of Latina Magazines” *Mass Communication and Society*, 2000. 3(2&3), 233.

¹⁰² Other less relevant functions of ethnic media not used in this research are: cultural transmission; establishment of a minority news agenda; and assimilation.

¹⁰³ Slagle, “Mightier than the Sword,” 40.

Resistant Eras and Revolutionary Journalists

To briefly review existing research on African-American women journalists, I first distinguish which women wrote in three historical periods--Slavery (1690-1865), Jim Crow (1866-1967), and Civil Rights (1947-1968).¹⁰⁴ The three time periods include the initial deracination of African Americans into the United States, and their subsequent struggles for physical, institutional, and societal freedoms. Previous research supports the idea that African-American female journalists used their writing to both address the struggles of blacks and advocate for historically specific social changes. As Broussard put it:

Historians have noted that black women played an active role in the struggle for black liberation...they were not merely participants in that fight, they were vocal leaders. They not only reacted to, but they were in the forefront of precipitating actions aimed at ending discrimination, lynching, segregation, and other conditions that affected their race and gender."¹⁰⁵

Slavery and Journalism

The legal institution of black African slavery in America spanned more than two centuries--from 1640 to 1865. During this time, more than 12 million black Africans were shipped to the Americas as slaves.¹⁰⁶ Toward the end of the black enslavement, the 1860 United States Census counted approximately 4 million blacks as slaves, constituting about one third of the total Southern population.¹⁰⁷ These harrowing decades saw the rise

¹⁰⁴ The Jim Crow and Civil Rights periods overlap in part due to the fact that lynching was still a prevalent practice well into the 1960s.

¹⁰⁵ Broussard, *Giving A Voice to the Voiceless*, 136.

¹⁰⁶ Ronald Segal. *The Black Diaspora: Five Centuries of the Black Experience Outside Africa* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995) p.4.

¹⁰⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, "Civil War Home Page: Results from the 1860s Census," http://www.civil-war.net/pages/1860_census.html (accessed May 12, 2008, 2008).

of abolitionists' writings but most likely due to their limited freedoms, few black women journalists wrote in the period.

Journalism historian Rodger Streitmatter studied two journalists writing during slavery, Maria W. Stewart and Mary Ann Shadd Cary.¹⁰⁸ Sisters in a common cause, Stewart's and Cary's journalism fiercely advocated for the abolition of slavery. Despite their similar goal, the two women's writings reflected their different experiences and outlooks.

Maria W. Stewart: 1803-1879

Maria W. Stewart had six weeks of formal education and worked most of her life as a domestic. She relied on her knowledge of the Bible and her own personal experiences to create her argument for the abolition of slavery. In 1830, Stewart took her essays to William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the *Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper. Impressed with her eloquence, Garrison created a "Ladies' Department" that served to highlight Stewart's writings. Her outspoken words such as these incurred the wrath of black men: "Methinks I heard a spiritual interrogation—Who shall go forward, and take off the reproach that is cast upon the people of color? Shall it be a woman? And my heart made this reply—If is thy will, be it even so, Lord Jesus!"¹⁰⁹ Her black brethren eventually forced Stewart into journalistic exile after only two years of writing.¹¹⁰

Mary Ann Shadd Cary: 1823-1893

Unlike Stewart, Mary Ann Shadd Cary was born into a wealthy, free black family. Cary had a formal education at a Quaker school and at 16 she started her own school for

¹⁰⁸ Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, Table of Contents.

¹⁰⁹ Maria W. Stewart, "Lecture Delivered at the Franklin Hall," *Liberator*, 17 November 1832, 183.

¹¹⁰ Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 15-17.

local blacks in Wilmington, Delaware. Her experiences in education led her to write her first pamphlet in 1849 and the injustices of slavery deepened Shadd's commitment to educate free blacks and escaped slaves. Shadd also began to delve into publishing, another way she felt she could educate blacks. Shadd conducted interviews and collected statistics to support her idea that free and/or runaway blacks should emigrate to Canada for a better life. Shadd grew to believe that the United States was not a safe place for free blacks especially after the Fugitive Slave Law was adopted in 1850.¹¹¹

Shadd's impassioned opinions advocating Canadian emigration put her in direct opposition with the only black newspaper, *Voice of the Fugitive*, in the Canadian West because it did not condone emigration. Convinced she could offer a different and better insight into emigration, Shadd decided to start her own newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman*, even though she knew that a woman would have a difficult time achieving acceptance in the newspaper community. She strategically decided to enlist the aid of two prominent newspapermen, Samuel Ward and Reverend Alexander McArthur, to act as the face of the paper and concealed her gender by writing under the name M.A. Shadd.

As M.A. Shadd she continued to advocate for emigration: "We say to the slave, You have a right to your freedom and to every other privilege connected with it and if you cannot secure these in Virginia or Alabama, by all means make your escape, without delay, to some other locality in God's wide universe..."¹¹² As the first black woman editor, Shadd's relentless dedication to educating and inspiring her community through

¹¹¹ This law made it legal for slave owners to hunt down runaway slaves in non-slave states.

¹¹² M. A. Shadd, "Letters must be addressed," *Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853.

journalism resulted in a lifelong career riddled with obstacles and triumphs, as have been chronicled by journalism historians Rodger Streitmatter and Jane Rhodes.¹¹³

Journalism in the Jim Crow Era

Fewer than 30 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, southern governments enacted laws to reinforce and reinvent the societal structure of slavery. As historian Ronald L.F. Davis described the period:

...In general the Jim Crow era in American history dates from the late 1890s, when southern states began systematically to codify (or strengthen) in law and state constitutional provisions the subordinate position of African Americans in society. Most of these legal steps were aimed at separating the races in public spaces (public schools, parks, accommodations, and transportation) and preventing adult black males from exercising the right to vote. In every state of the former Confederacy, the system of legalized segregation and disfranchisement was fully in place by 1910. This system of white supremacy cut across class boundaries and re-enforced a cult of "whiteness" that predated the Civil War.¹¹⁴

To enforce these laws, lay members of white society formed into mobs, and often in cahoots with law enforcement, began policing blacks through violence and threats of violence, which can be broadly categorized as lynching. This period¹¹⁵ of mob rule performed ritualized torture specifically targeting African-Americans and also white Americans who appeared to threaten and/or violate the southern social/racial structure in place. According to the archives at the Tuskegee Institute, more than 4,700 people were victims of lynching during the Jim Crow era.¹¹⁶ In response to this new evil, African-

¹¹³ Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 26-33; Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 284.

¹¹⁴ Ronald L. F. Davis, "Creating Jim Crow: An In-Depth Essay," *The History of Jim Crow*, February 28, 2008, <http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/history/creating2.htm/>.

¹¹⁵ Although historians differ on the starting and ending dates of the Jim Crow period, this research will use the broadest period of the late 1860s to mid 1950s.

¹¹⁶ Archives of the Tuskegee Institute, "Lynchings: By Year and Race," University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law, <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/shipp/lynchingyear.html> (accessed May 12, 2008, 2008).

American journalists wrote against lynching and Jim Crow practices. This is the period during which a number of black women journalists, such as Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells, flexed their writing and vocal powers.

Mary Church Terrell: 1863-1954

Coincidentally, it was the lynching of Thomas Moss¹¹⁷ in 1892 that spurred the journalistic fires of both Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell.¹¹⁸ Mary Church Terrell, a childhood friend of Moss, delved into advocacy journalism after his murder and “journalism became one of the avenues through which she sought to expose, ameliorate, challenge, and comment on the practices of the white power structure.”¹¹⁹ In her book, *Giving A Voice to the Voiceless*, Jinx Coleman Broussard summarizes the varied topics Terrell addressed in her 67-year-long writing career.

Terrell’s interest in the betterment of black people, coupled with her affluent upbringing, paved the way for landmark political and civic appointments and opportunities not generally afforded the black population during the late 19th century.¹²⁰ Her extensive travels in Europe provided her with a special view of race issues because there she personally experienced the often progressive treatment of black people. In her writing, Terrell often reflected and lauded the favorable treatment of blacks in European countries.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Moss was one of the three black men, who Ida B. Wells knew as well, who owned the grocery store that competed with a white market. Moss’s lynching, along with two other black men, angered Wells.

¹¹⁸ Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington, D. C.: Ransdell Inc, 1940), 230.

¹¹⁹ Broussard, *Giving A Voice to the Voiceless*, 61.

¹²⁰ Dorothy Sterling, *Black Foremothers: Three Lives* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1988) 120-148.

Terrell's life experiences and education prepared and prompted her to defend her causes in political and social arenas. She became the first woman of color to serve on the U. S. Board of Education (1895-1901; 1906-1911).¹²¹ Terrell also founded the National Association of Colored Women and served as its first president. Years of impressive community and social contributions did not detract from but instead fueled Terrell's commitment to writing advocacy articles in numerous black papers. On occasion her articles broke the news color barrier and were featured in white mainstream papers as well.¹²²

Terrell lambasted the United States for its declaration to fight for democracy in World War I while failing to ensure democracy through race relations at home. She wrote:

Since the war, one hears practically nothing about Democracy. Not only has no real concerted effort been made to establish it in the United States..., but it is almost never referred to and it is rarely, if ever discussed. Therefore, colored people have lost faith in the white man. The majority now believes that race prejudice is so innate in the white United Statesian, that even though he promised to eradicate it, he is never mentally, morally, and spiritually incapacitated to do it.¹²³

Just as committed to gender parity, Terrell continually wrote and spoke out about black women's struggle with American racism and sexism. Terrell's lecture circuit on this topic provided material for her articles; often her lectures at prominent events were published in black newspapers. One such speech delivered on February 18, 1898 at the

¹²¹ Roberta Church and Ronald Walter, "Mary Church Terrell: 1863-1954," Tennessee State University, <http://www.tnstate.edu/library/digital/terrell.htm> (accessed May 12, 2008, 2008).

¹²² Some of the papers where Terrell's articles were featured: *Washington Evening Star*, *Boston Herald*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, the *Voice of the Negro*, *Crisis*, *New York Age*, and the *Washington Post*.

¹²³ As cited in Jinx Coleman Broussard, *Giving A Voice to the Voiceless*, footnote 87 of Chapter 3, Mary Church Terrell, "The Racial Worm Turns," Manuscript in Mary Church Terrell Papers, Moorland Springarn Collection, Series D, Box 102, Folder 92, Howard University, Washington D.C.

National American Women's Suffrage Association served as inspiration for an article she wrote for *The Voice of the Negro* in 1904.¹²⁴ The speech and subsequent article detailed the unique positioning and plight of American black women:

For, not only are colored women with ambition and aspiration handicapped on account of their sex, but they are everywhere baffled and mocked on account of their race. Desperately and continuously they are forced to fight that opposition, born of a cruel, unreasonable prejudice which neither their merit nor their necessity seems able to subdue. Not only because they are women, but because they are colored women, are discouragement and disappointment meeting them at every turn.¹²⁵

Charlotta A. Bass: 1874-1969

Across the nation a sister journalist waged her own written crusade against racism and sexism. Charlotta A. Bass started her journalism career at age 20 when she moved from her hometown of Sumter, South Carolina to live with her brother in Rhode Island. She gained employment working for the local black newspaper, the *Providence Watchman* as an "office girl."¹²⁶ Due to health problems, she relocated to Los Angeles in 1910 at age 36. In L.A. she found a job selling subscriptions to the *Eagle*, the state's oldest black newspaper. Two years later, *Eagle* owner, John Neimore, on his deathbed, asked Bass to assume editorship of the paper. Two months later she bought the paper for

¹²⁴ Mary Church Terrell, "The Progress of Colored Women," *The Voice of the Negro* (July 1904).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ There is some historical discrepancy as to how Bass acquired the *Eagle*--The Southern California Library Archives contend that the paper was bought by Captain G. W. Hawkins, a local businessman, and then he turned over the paper to Bass. Historian Rodger Streitmatter posits that she originally bought the paper. <http://www.socallib.org/bass/research/eagle/index.html> and

Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 96.

\$50 at a public auction. Bass became the paper's "publisher, editor, reporter, business manager, distributor, printer, and janitor."¹²⁷

The *Eagle* experienced rapid changes and took on controversial crusades under the direction of Bass. In 1913, Bass changed the name of the paper from the *Eagle* to the *California Eagle* and began her 39-year reign as a voice for a radical racial revolution. In 1914, she married her managing editor, Joseph Bass, and he worked alongside her until his death in 1934.

In 1915, the paper took on famed Hollywood producer, D.W. Griffiths, and tried to stop the production of the movie, "Birth of a Nation" because of its negative portrayal of blacks. She contended, "as long as the Afro-Americans of this country sit supinely by and raise no voice against the injustice heaped upon them, conditions for them in this country will grow worse."¹²⁸ Bass' battle against the noted producer garnered national attention.

The surge in publicity stimulated a tidal wave of countrywide speaking engagements. Much like Terrell's European experience, the extensive travel provided an expanded worldview for Bass. According to historian Rodger Streitmatter, Bass' speeches against social and racial injustices encouraged "Texas farmers to rebel against their employer, Herbert C. Hoover; In 1917 she spoke fiery words to workers in Kansas City, Chicago, Boston, and New York City."¹²⁹ The lecture circuit benefited Bass and the *California Eagle*, which increased circulation outside California state lines.

¹²⁷ Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 96.

¹²⁸ Charlotta Bass, "The Afro-Americans of Los Angeles Demand the Clansman in Motion Pictures be Denied Admittance," *California Eagle*, February 13, 1915. As cited by Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 97.

¹²⁹ Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 97.

Ever committed to journalism, Bass took courses at the University of California and Columbia University (1926-1927) to enhance her journalism technique/skills. After studying at Columbia, Bass inaugurated a weekly editorial column entitled, "On the Sidewalk." The column and the paper continued to serve as a platform for Bass' advocacy.

Bass focused on both race and gender issues but she took extra care to not pit one issue against the other.¹³⁰ On numerous occasions her editorial column encouraged black women with such cries as:

"WOMEN! WOMEN! WOMEN! Particularly Negro Women, this call comes to you! It is up to us to DO something about our position in the body politic of this nation. Let us be aware that we have a glorious history in our land...Many are the stories of heart rending courage that the Negro women of the slave period have handed down to us...They were the mothers of a hundred rebellions, all of which our standard history texts have conveniently forgotten. Yet black women have a tradition which they must not forget and which they must not fail."¹³¹

In the following years, Bass mobilized the L.A. black community's men and women to address their grievances with social action such as boycotts. There were no goliaths too big for Bass and her paper; she took on the KKK, the Southern California Telephone Company, Boulder Dam, housing agencies, and a string of big businesses. In response to her efforts, she was the subject of numerous investigations headed by the FBI, the U.S. Post Office, the CIA, the State Department, and the War Department.¹³² Despite arrests, libel suits, abuse, and death threats, Bass persevered and stayed

¹³⁰ Southern California Library, "Charlotta Bass and the California Eagle," <http://www.socallib.org/bass/story/index.html> (accessed May 12, 2008, 2008).

¹³¹ Charlotta Bass, "On the Sidewalk," *California Eagle*, August 17, 1942. (Retrieved through Southern California Library, "Charlotta Bass and the California Eagle," <http://www.socallib.org/bass/story/index.html> (accessed May 12, 2008, 2008).

¹³² Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 96.

committed to her cause, which was summarized in the *California Eagle's* platform published in 1930:

"The hiring of Negroes as a matter of right, rather than as a concession, in those institutions where their patronage creates a demand for labor; The increased participation of Negroes in municipal, state, and national government; The abolition of enforced segregation and all other artificial barriers to the recognition of true merit; The patronizing of Negroes by Negroes as a matter of principle; More rapid development of those communities in which Negroes live, by cooperation between citizens and those who have business investments in such communities; An enthusiastic support for a greater degree of service at the hands of all social, civic, charitable, and religious institutions."¹³³

Black Feminist Standpoint Theory

The originality of the black woman's experience in the United States left them with few who could fully relate and even fewer allies. According to Hine, "although black women and white women may share many concerns, they do not always have the same demons. 'Liberation' means something different to white women than to black women. Black women want and need 'liberation,' but they are more likely to define that word in terms of power and rights."¹³⁴ While biology connected them as women, hegemonic constructions dictated their rivalry.

White women were lauded for their purity, black women were sexualized and exploited. White women's work centered on their families and their homes. Black women were forced to leave their families and homes. White women were admonished and punished for their relations with black men while their white men raped black women. From the time when black women were extracted from their homes and forced to work in white women's homes, the definitions of black and white womanhood were distorted and

¹³³ Charlotta Bass, "The California Eagle Platform," *California Eagle*, December 19, 1930.

¹³⁴ Hine, *Shining Thread of Hope*, 300.

transformed. Over time the opposing/conflicting definitions of black and white womanhood hindered their relationship with one another: “The pitting of black women against white women produced suspicions and rivalries that affected the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and the women’s movement.”¹³⁵

Black Women and Mainstream Feminism: Where the Two Roads Diverged

Early on white women had joined forces with black movements to bolster their own efforts for equality. Black feminist bell hooks proposed that the “white women’s rights movement which had a lukewarm beginning in earlier reform activities emerged in full force in the wake of efforts to gain rights for black people precisely because white women wanted to see no change in the social status of blacks until they were assured that their demands for more rights were met.”¹³⁶ Historian Lynne Olson employed historical data to support hooks’s assertion that white women were not completely altruistic in their support of abolition. After the ratification of the 15th Amendment, which allowed black men to vote, suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony voiced their dismay that white women were still denied the right to vote. Olson notes, “As for Stanton and Anthony, instead of simply continuing to demand voting for men and women, they denounced Congress for favoring ‘degraded, oppressed men’ over the ‘daughters of Jefferson, Hancock and Adams.’”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Olson, *Freedom’s Daughters*, 26.

¹³⁶ bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (USA: South End Press Collective, 1981), 126.

¹³⁷ Olson, *Freedom’s Daughters*, 31.

In the unfolding play for power, black women went unacknowledged. White women's desertion of black women in the fight for suffrage added more strain to their already rocky relationship. Despite the snub by white women, some black women kept on working with the suffrage movement. Sojourner Truth continued to give speeches at suffrage rallies, speeches that unequivocally promoted the rights of both white and black women and black men. Harriet Tubman, mother of the Underground Railroad, also joined the suffrage movement in New York.¹³⁸

While Tubman and Truth could align themselves with both movements and reconcile the ideological discord, most black women activists thought it best to choose. Many black women thought if they were to join "Stanton and Anthony, they would be throwing in their lot with women who were prepared to deny the major right of citizenship to black women's fathers and brothers and husbands, thereby assuring continued white hegemony over blacks. But if black women supported voting for black men only, they would be endorsing a plan that would give them no voice at all."¹³⁹ Most black women chose to devote their time, talents, and strategies to the uplifting of their own race. Historically and socially, black women knew both racism and sexism, but the racism their men faced was more comprehensible than the sexism described by their white sisters.

It would have been a formidable force: black and white women together, but the chasm created by racism kept these two groups of women estranged. White women's

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 32.

reform movements in the First Wave and Second Wave of Feminism¹⁴⁰ fell prey to the prevailing pandemic of racism both in its ideological discourses and myopic demands for equality. Black feminist bell hooks traces the division between white and black women's reform when she states,

Sexist discrimination has prevented white women from assuming the dominant role in the perpetuation of white racial imperialism, but it has not prevented white women from absorbing, supporting, and advocating racist ideology or acting individually as racist oppressors in various spheres of American life. Every women's movement in America from its earliest origin to the present day has been built on a racist foundation--a fact which in no way invalidates feminism as a political ideology.¹⁴¹

Thus, while white women pushed for their rights at the ballot box and in the workplace, black women, never fully invited into the white women's struggle, stood alongside their men in the fight against racism.

The pull and tug generated by the ideological bifurcation of both the feminist and race-centered movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries consistently plagued black women. In their decision to concentrate their efforts on combating racism, black women still had to combat the sexist ideology in their own communities. Black women remained relatively invisible. As Olson wrote, in the "century to come, black women would remain largely invisible to the public eye--in the renewed fight for women's suffrage in the early 1900s, in the modern civil rights movement, and in the blossoming of the women's movement of the late 1960s. When one talked about "blacks," one usually meant black men. When "women" were discussed, the emphasis was on white women."¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ First Wave Feminism, beginning in the 1860s, focused on suffrage; in the Second Wave, 1950-70, the aim was to gain more equality in the work force.

¹⁴¹ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 124.

¹⁴² Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 32.

The Five Themes of Black Women's Empowerment and Resistance

While recognizing that this research is not a panacea for “invisibility,” it does aim to create greater visibility for a segment of black women who played an important role in the history of black and white Americans. The lives and work of the five journalists just discussed as well as the three included in this study can be understood through the framework of a black feminist standpoint, which helps explain the situation of American black women. Previous feminist standpoint research, generally focused on the experiences and insights of white, middle-class, heterosexual, American women, often omitted the multiple social prejudices reflected in black women's lives.¹⁴³ Black feminist standpoint theory augments feminist scholarship, in part by examining the multiple social oppressions operative in a black woman's experience.

According to Patricia Hill Collins, author of *Black Feminist Thought*, “U.S. Black women encounter a distinctive set of social practices that accompany our particular history within a unique matrix of domination characterized by intersecting oppressions...being black and female in the United States continues to expose African American women to certain common experiences...overall, U.S. black women as a group live in a different world from that of people who are not black and female.”¹⁴⁴

Because black feminist theory offers tailored insight into the specific plight of American black women, this project uses the theory as a valuable tool in examining the lives of black female journalists. As black feminist scholar bell hooks argues:

¹⁴³ B.T. Dill and M.B. Zinn, “Race and Gender: Revisioning the Social Sciences.” *Doing Feminism: Teaching and Research in the Academy* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Great Britain: Routledge, 2000), 23.

As a group black women are in an unusual position in this society, for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall status is lower than that of any other group. Occupying such a position, we bear the brunt of sexist, racist, and classist oppression. At the same time, we are the group that has not been socialized to assume the role of exploiter/oppressor in that we are allowed no institutionalized other that we can exploit or oppress. Black women with no institutionalized “other” that we may discriminate against, exploit, or oppress often have lived experience that directly challenges the prevailing classist, sexist, racist social structure and its concomitant ideology.¹⁴⁵

An effective challenge to societal oppressions begins with black women empowering themselves. According to activist and author Toni Cade Bambara, “revolution begins with the self, in the self.”¹⁴⁶ According to black feminist standpoint theory, empowerment is a process by which a woman begins to own her individual experience. A woman is empowered when she recognizes her personal struggles and obstacles and shares her experience(s) with others. By so doing she takes a relatively private and solitary experience and contributes it to a larger social conversation. This dialogue serves to connect the woman with her community and contributes to her empowerment.¹⁴⁷

Empowerment enables resistance when a woman makes the effort to change her experience. Empowerment can lead to personal resistance, as when an individual woman actively engages in contesting injustices in her personal sphere. A good example of this was when Ida B. Wells refused to take a segregated seat on the Ohio and Chesapeake railroad train. When a woman motivates those around her to challenge the oppressive

¹⁴⁵ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1984), 6.

¹⁴⁶ Toni Cade Bambara, “On the Issues of Roles” in *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (New York Signet, 1970), p. 109.

¹⁴⁷ Patricia S. Parker, “Control, Resistance, and Empowerment in Raced, Gendered, and Classed Work Contexts: The Case of African American Women” In *Communication Yearbook 27*, ed. Pamela J. Kalbfleisch, 27th ed. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 262.

social obstacles that have directly affected her, she engages in collective action. When Charlotta Bass encouraged the L.A. black community to rebel against employers with racist policies she was encouraging collective action.

A consistent thread of empowerment and resistance connects the lives and work of the black women journalists who have been profiled previously. Patricia Collins describes how empowerment leads to resistance or “how independent self-definitions empower Black women to bring about self change. By struggling for self-defined womanist perspectives that reject the ‘master’s’ images, African-American women change ourselves. A critical mass of individuals with a changed consciousness can in turn foster Black women’s collective empowerment. A changed consciousness encourages people to change the conditions of their lives.”¹⁴⁸

According to communications scholar Patricia Parker, “black feminist perspectives on empowerment emphasize five themes related to African American women’s empowerment: (1) developing and using voice, (2) being self-defined, (3) being self-determined, (4) connecting to and building community, and (5) seeking spirituality and regeneration.”¹⁴⁹ Parker’s thematic approach to black women’s empowerment toward resistance will be applied in this research project with the aim of better understanding the lives and work of three African-American women journalists who wrote during the Civil Rights era. The black women journalists working during the Civil Rights Movement also can be seen as empowered black women who resisted the oppressions of their time, both in their lives and in their work. Empowerment, both the predecessor and companion to

¹⁴⁸ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 117.

¹⁴⁹ Parker, “Control, Resistance, and Empowerment in Raced, Gendered, and Classed Work Contexts,” 263.

resistance, played a crucial role in the lives of the black female journalists--Francis Murphy, Lucile Bluford, and Dorothy Gilliam included here. Their stories (based on oral history interviews) add further insight about personal empowerment and the resistance practices of black women.

In her 1990 book, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, bell hooks described the development and use of voice in three ways: “(a) breaking silence against oppression, (b) developing reflexive speech through dialogues among individual women, (c) confronting or talking back to elite discourses.”¹⁵⁰ Ida B. Wells demonstrated the power of her voice when she encouraged the black community in Memphis to move out of the area due to a lynching.

Parker’s themes of being self-defined and self-determined are closely connected. According to Patricia Collins in her book, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, to be self-defined means exhibiting and exercising the ability to describe/vocalize one’s own reality, while self-determination is the power to believe in changing one’s own destiny. Mary Church Terrell exhibited self-definition when she used her wealth to bring attention to the prevailing problems of all blacks, regardless of socio-economic status. Mary Ann Shadd Cary showed self-determination by starting her own newspaper despite the sexist nature of the business.

The fourth theme of connecting to and building community Parker defined as “activities to strengthen family and kinship ties, combat racism, and empower communities to survive, grow, and advance.”¹⁵¹ This characteristic can be seen

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.,

¹⁵¹ Parker, "Control, Resistance, and Empowerment in Raced, Gendered, and Classed Work Contexts," 263.

throughout the lives of all the black female journalists previously profiled. Perhaps one of the strongest representations of this theme was Charlotta Bass's unrelenting commitment to using her newspaper in directing the Los Angeles black community in its fight for equality and justice.

Spirituality and regeneration, the fifth theme, can be described as the reliance of African American women on their spiritual center. This center serves to "provide answers, explanations, and a focus toward the future."¹⁵² One cannot study the history of black women in America without acknowledging spirituality as a part of their power in surviving and striving amidst oppression. Black feminist scholars note that the omission of spirituality as a factor in empowerment would inhibit an understanding of American black women.¹⁵³ Maria Stewart never shied from her spiritual and religious convictions as she pleaded the case for the abolition of slavery. Her articles consistently made reference to God and the Bible.

The black women journalists who have already been studied illustrate how black feminist theory can aid in understanding their lives as empowered black women. Although all five journalists came from dissimilar backgrounds, wrote in different eras, and combated varying social ills, they can all be considered empowered black feminists. Table 1 shows the dominant theme of empowerment that can be seen in the life and work of each woman.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Parker, "Control, Resistance, and Empowerment in Raced, Gendered, and Classed Work Contexts," 263..

Table 1: The five dominant themes of empowerment as practiced by black female journalists previously profiled

Journalist	Historical Time Period	Dominant Theme* of Empowerment
Maria W. Stewart	Slavery	5: Religion and spirituality served as the backbone to Stewart's education, journalism and life.
Mary Ann Shadd Cary	Slavery	3: Cary showed self-determination by starting her own newspaper that represented her beliefs about emigration.
Mary Church Terrell	Jim Crow	2: Despite her wealthy upbringing, Terrell committed her life to justice for black women and less fortunate men.
Charlotta Bass	Jim Crow	4: Bass supported, encouraged, and advocated for the L.A. black community through her newspaper.
Ida B. Wells	Jim Crow	1: Wells demonstrated the power of voice when she almost financially crippled a city.

*Themes are: (1) developing and using voice, (2) being self-defined, (3) being self-determined, (4) connecting to and building community, (5) seeking spirituality and regeneration¹⁵⁴

In this project the lives of three women journalists writing during the Civil Rights era, Frances L. Murphy, Dorothy Gilliam, and Lucile Bluford, will be examined in light of Parker's empowerment themes. This research aims to answer these questions about the three women:

1. What themes of empowerment can be found in these women's lives?

¹⁵⁴ Parker, "Control, Resistance, and Empowerment in Raced, Gendered, and Classed Work Contexts," 263.

2. Based on their life experiences, what themes, if any, can be added to Parker's conceptualization of black women's empowerment?

Table 2 shows which women were included in the Women in Journalism Project and the characteristics used to choose the three who will be included in this study.

Table 2: African-American Female Journalists from the Civil Rights Movement era Interviewed by the Women In Journalism Project

African-American Journalists Interviewed	Previous Research	Type of Career in Journalism
*Lucile Bluford	--	Newspaper (editor of Black press paper and advocate for the integration of journalism education)
Marvel Cooke	Streitmatter's <i>Raising Her Voice</i>	Newspaper
Belva Davis	--	Radio
*Dorothy Gilliam	--	Newspaper (reporter for the black press papers and the <i>Washington Post</i>)
Charlayne Hunter - Gault	Streitmatter's <i>Raising Her Voice</i>	Newspaper, Radio, Television
*Frances L. Murphy	--	Newspaper (Black Press Editor and Owner)
Ethel Payne	Streitmatter's <i>Raising Her Voice</i>	Newspaper
Carole Simpson	--	Broadcast

*These women met all four selection criteria: (1) African-American; (2) Civil Rights era journalist; (3) no previously published research about her career; (4) Career centered in newspaper journalism.

Journalism History and the Application of Black Feminist Theory

Two journalism historians, Rodger Streitmatter and Jinx Broussard, have written about black women journalists who worked in the period between slavery and civil rights. Streitmatter and Broussard both write a concluding synthesis in their books about the black journalists featured in their research. Their analyses clearly provided evidence of Parker's five themes of empowerment and resistance, although neither author used the theoretical framework.

Broussard noted that the journalists she studied demonstrated characteristics of what Parker defines as self-definition or the power to name one's own reality.¹⁵⁵ Broussard's journalists, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Amy Jacques Garvey, "agreed on gender issues, and although they wrote primarily on race issues, they differed in their approaches to tackling the race problem in the United States. Their writings, both in tone and content, often reflected those differences."¹⁵⁶ And in the spirit of self definition, these journalists shared similar struggles yet they demonstrated such self-certainty as to handle *their* journalism, *their* way and on *their* terms. In sum, these journalists wrote differently from one another and stayed loyal to their writing style.

These journalists were able to define themselves and their journalism according to the dictates of their own consciousness, displaying unprecedented confidence in the way they approached their reformative writings. Broussard noticed that both Terrell and

¹⁵⁵Patricia S. Parker, *Race, Gender and Leadership: Re-Envisioning Organizational Leadership From the Perspectives of African-American Women Executives* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2005), 37.

¹⁵⁶ Jinx Coleman Broussard, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 143.

Dunbar-Nelson wrote in a more multi-dimensional way than Wells-Barnett and Garvey. While Wells-Barnett and Garvey stayed focused on “racial issues, politics and economics,” the other two journalists also wrote about art, society and travel. And even in their writings/views concerning issues of race, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Jacques Garvey¹⁵⁷ manifested disparities in their journalistic approach. Broussard notes:

Scholars identify Wells-Barnett as a militant, defiant agitator. Those categorizations also fit the other women, for all of them protested, chastised, and criticized, and agitated on the behalf of blacks. The tone of their protest, however, sometimes differed. But, Jacques-Garvey was much more strident than the other women in this study... Wells-Barnett more often than not laid blame for the plight of blacks squarely at the feet of whites. On the other hand, Jacques Garvey focused her criticism not just on the white imperialists, but also consistently on the black race for what she call its lethargy and black men for what she called their laziness and slothfulness. While Wells-Barnett reserved her harshest tones for whites, Jacques-Garvey appeared equally strident when referring to whites and when writing to and about blacks.

These women journalists displayed a strong sense of self-definition in the way they approached their journalistic work. The individuality of their work illustrated their ability to define themselves not only as journalists with a distinct approach but as individual black women. The pervasive negative images of black women forced black women to self (re)define; if they were to have any worth/importance at all it would have to stem from their individual ingenuity in claiming their worth.

As Collins writes, “For U.S. black women, constructed knowledge of self emerges from the struggle to replace controlling images with self-defined knowledge

¹⁵⁷ Jacques Garvey was another black female journalist working during the same time period as Ida B. Wells.

deemed personally important, usually knowledge essential to black women's survival."¹⁵⁸

While racial and gender oppression share the common denominator of dehumanization, the processes and delivery of oppression act as an ever-changing variable in the equality equation. This research tracks the changes in self-definition exhibited in Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam's lives.

As to the second theme of self-determination, Broussard states that none of the black women journalists featured in her research, "allowed Jim Crow practices in the country to prevent them from giving a voice to blacks and seeking to correct the misrepresentations of the race, or advocating on behalf of blacks."¹⁵⁹ The journalists in Broussard's study demonstrated remarkable resolve to keep working and writing despite widespread fear and violence characterized by the practices of the Jim Crow era. Their resolve to continue their roles as emissaries of equality amid such oppression serves as an exemplar of self-determination. Gilliam, Bluford, and Murphy also exhibited self-determination in their personal lives and through their work. This project suggests that their self-determination was implanted and nurtured through struggle and sacrifice.

Parker's themes of spiritual regeneration and developing and using voice, are best illustrated in Rodger Streitmatter's concluding commentary. In the final pages of his book, *Raising her Voice*, Streitmatter discusses how the 11 black women journalists he studied exhibited a "strong spirituality. For several of the women, spirituality was not an abstract concept but a direct influence on their professional lives."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000),

¹⁵⁹ Broussard, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless*, 138.

¹⁶⁰ Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 146.

This project proposes that while the church served as the crux for black women's political and social activism, it was not the sole venue in which they sought their spiritual rejuvenation. As Parker notes, "a more complex understanding of strength demonstrated in the lives of African American women throughout history must take into account the role of spirit and spiritual life as a source of healing, joy, and empowerment and liberation."¹⁶¹ This project explores how Gilliam, Bluford, and Murphy continually regenerated their spirits through their relationships with fellow black men and women not only in more institutional spiritual settings.

Patricia Collins noted the inherent value in black women's relationships. She refers to these relationships (black women with black women) as safe spaces in which black women develop and express themselves. There is a spiritual nature also in the relationships black women have with black men, as husbands, fathers, brothers, and friend and colleagues. And while black men were operative in the matrix of domination,¹⁶² they could and did contribute to black women's liberation. The important and sometimes empowering relationship between black men and women did not go unnoticed by historian Rodger Streitmatter. "Ironically, one factor that helped these black women succeed in journalism directly involves the most significant obstacle hindering

¹⁶¹ Parker, *Race, Gender and Leadership*, 42.

¹⁶² Page 499 in *Black Feminist Thought*. According to Collins, this is the "overall organization of hierarchal power relationships for any society. Any specific matrix of domination has (1) a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression, e.g. race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ethnicity and age, and (2) a particular organization of its domains of power, e.g., structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal."

white women in the same field: men. The male journalists who worked with the women described in this book were largely supportive of the women's efforts."¹⁶³

In an effort to attain a clearer comprehension of the male/female dynamics that can constitute spirituality, this project discusses how the black men, as supporting actors to the women in this research, motivated their daughters, wives, and colleagues to live lives of triumph. Arguably, these relationships had a regenerative power for Gilliam, Bluford, and Murphy in both their professional and personal lives. The rewards of these female/female and male/female relationships provided these women with the spiritual stamina necessary for sustained resistance.

Streitmatter concluded that the black female journalists in his research demonstrated originality of voice through their journalism. He noted, "None of these women described in this book allowed herself to be confined to the limited scope of objective reporting. Instead, each brought their own perspective to her work."¹⁶⁴ Broussard also noted the value of independent voice in the lives of these black female journalists she studied. So important was voice that both journalism historians Broussard, (*Voice to the Voiceless*) and Streitmatter (*Raising Their Voice*) used the word in the title of their books.

Building on Broussard's and Streitmatter's work, this study analyzes, through oral and written accounts, the metamorphic cycle of voice for three black women journalists working in the Civil Rights era. This research addresses two specific questions about black women's voice.

¹⁶³ Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 148.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

1. How do these black women journalists exhibit their voices?
2. How are their voices manifested in their journalism?

In summation, this research project uses Black Feminist Theory and Parker's five themes of empowerment and resistance in discussing the lives of Bluford, Murphy and Gilliam. Alternative media theory along with ethnic media theory also aids in examining the written work.

Chapter 4:
Black Feminist Theory in the Lives of Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam

“I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background.”

--Zora Neale Hurston¹⁶⁵

In this chapter Parker’s five themes of empowerment toward resistance are illustrated through the oral histories of Bluford, Murphy and Gilliam. Three of the themes, self-determination, self-definition, and spiritual regeneration are most clearly seen. Voice and connection to community are discussed in more detail in the next chapter that looks more closely at the women’s writings. This chapter serves to unify Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam’s experience as black woman journalists with that of their predecessors. It also sets them apart. The Civil Rights Movement was a unique period in American history. The experiences of these three women, while akin to earlier journalists, were also different. This chapter charts and discusses Bluford’s, Murphy’s and Gilliam’s path to empowerment and resistance in a distinct time.

¹⁶⁵ Natalie Goldberg, *Old Friend From Far Away: The Practice of Writing Memoir* (New York: New York: Free Press, 2007), 71.

Lucile Bluford

Timeline:

July 1, 1911--Born in Salisbury, North Carolina

1915--Bluford's mother, Viola Harris Bluford, died

1918--Moved to Kansas City, Missouri to join her father, stepmother and two brothers

1928--Graduated from Lincoln High School

1928-1932--Attended University of Kansas

1932--Started working full time for the *Kansas City Call*

1937--Bluford appointed managing editor of the *Call*

1939--Bluford applied to the University of Missouri's graduate journalism program

1939-1941--Bluford filed a lawsuit against the University of Missouri

1940s/1950s—Continued involvement in organizations combating social inequalities

1955--Chester A. Franklin, owner and publisher of the *Call*, died. Bluford made editor-in-chief of the *Call*

1963--Bluford helped usher in the Public Accommodations Act

1972—traveled in Israel

1991--Bluford receives honorary doctorate from the University of Missouri

June 13, 2003--Bluford died at age 91 in Kansas City, Missouri

Lucile Bluford

In 2003, Lucile Bluford died after more than 70 years in journalism.

Bluford began her journalistic career writing for her high school newspaper. She continued working in journalism until her death at age 91. Most of her prolific journalistic career was with her hometown black newspaper, the *Kansas City Call*. In her more than 60 years with the *Call*, Bluford wrote, edited, then managed and eventually owned the weekly paper. While holding down her full-time career as a journalist, Bluford remained an avid activist. In hopes of changing the racial climate of the country, Bluford also participated in the national and local chapters of the NAACP. As an activist she formed a local human rights coalition, and organized and participated in sit-ins and countless protests.

Bluford's Self-Definition and Self-Determination

Self-definition and self-determination are the clearest feminist empowerment themes in Bluford's life. Bluford was four when her mother, Viola Harris Bluford, died. After her mother's death, Bluford's father moved the family from Salisbury, NC to Kansas City, MI. In one of her first shows of determination, young Lucile requested to stay in North Carolina with her grandmother, Mariah Harris. Bluford's father acquiesced. He left Bluford in North Carolina and moved the rest of the family (stepmother and two sons) to Missouri. "I didn't want to come. So I stayed there,"¹⁶⁶ Bluford said years later.

Bluford stayed in Salisbury until her grandmother's death in 1921 when Bluford was 10. Those six years with her grandmother were memorable ones for Bluford: "I

¹⁶⁶ The Reminiscences of Lucile H. Bluford, interview by Fern Ingersoll, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project: The Washington Press Club Foundation*, (May 13, 1989), 5.

guess she (grandmother) taught me about everything I knew. Yeah, she had a lot of influence on me. I don't know whether I can think of any particular things or not, but she did teach me a lot."¹⁶⁷ Thus, Bluford, even as a child, knew what she wanted and what was best for her.

A passion for reading is another example of Bluford's early self-determination. Bluford learned to love books from her Aunt Josie, a librarian. "I used to go up to her house, it seems like it was every Sunday. Oh, there were children's stories, and fairy tales...I just know I used to go up there and listen to her read all the time. And I really enjoyed it. And I guess from there I started reading myself. Then, as I was growing up, as one of my neighbors would say, I read all day long."¹⁶⁸

Bluford's voracious reading forced her to seek out more books. The absence of a public library in the black section of her town did not deter her. She walked a mile and a half, in her words "a long ways,"¹⁶⁹ to the closest library at Central High, a whites-only school to get books she wanted to read.¹⁷⁰

As Bluford grew so did her ability to define herself. In her youth, Bluford clearly showed her ability to define herself outside of society's parameters and restrictions. In the 1920s and 1930s, when Bluford was an adolescent, black women were relegated to domestic jobs and teaching. Bluford said she knew even in high school that she wanted a

¹⁶⁷ The Reminiscences of Lucile H. Bluford, interview by Fern Ingersoll, *Women in Journalism Oral History Project: The Washington Press Club Foundation*, (May 13, 1989), 4.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ More than 60 years later, in 1988, the Lucile H. Bluford Branch of the Kansas City Public Library opened in the heart of Kansas City, Missouri. On March 3, 2010, the library reopened, after six months and approximately \$1.3 million dollars in renovations. The library also houses an exhibit including a collection of photos and historical memorabilia from Lucile Bluford's life and work at the *Call*. The website for the library is <http://www.kclibrary.org/?q=bluford>.

different career path: “I knew I was going to have a career. I knew that. I didn’t know exactly what. All I knew for sure was that I did not want to be a teacher. I don’t know why, but I just never did think I could teach people, or want to teach them...(I wanted to) do something different.”¹⁷¹

Also as part of her defiance, Bluford scarcely regarded the personal and societal expectations of her as a woman. In a time when women were expected to be wives and mothers, Bluford said, “...I didn’t think too much about marriage and children. I didn’t think too much about it. If it happened, okay. If it didn’t, okay. As it happened, it didn’t.”¹⁷² “I never had any great desire to have children of my own, no. I don’t think I missed it.”¹⁷³

Bluford’s opposition to the status quo lasted a lifetime and did not stop at marriage, motherhood and career choices; it also extended to fashion. Bluford said she was encouraged during her career to wear attire appropriate for a professional woman. But she said, “Clothes were never important to me and still are not. [Chuckles.] I don’t know why. I just liked to wear something comfortable. I never was interested in dressing up.”¹⁷⁴ Part of Bluford’s adherence to comfortable clothing was the omission of the then popular dress hat. “I didn’t wear a hat and a lot of people thought that was real strange. People wore hats, you know, and I didn’t wear hats.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Bluford Interview, (May 13, 1989), 19.

¹⁷² Bluford Interview, (March 19, 1990), 162.

¹⁷³ Bluford Interview, (August 28, 1989), 128.

¹⁷⁴ Bluford Interview, (May 13, 1989), 8.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 25.

Bluford's pursuit of an uncommon career path combined with her laissez faire attitude toward marriage and motherhood pressures and even fashion demonstrate how she defined herself as a woman apart from the dominant societal and cultural standards. Undaunted by society's constraints, Bluford carried on with her life plans and soon fell in love with journalism while writing for her high school newspaper, the *Lincolnian*.

As valedictorian of her 1928 high school class, Bluford attended Kansas University to pursue journalism. Bluford credits Marie Ross for the opportunity to pursue a degree in journalism at KU. Ross was the first African-American woman to go through Kansas University's journalism program. "She wasn't going to give in...she was very persistent. So she was a senior. I came in the year she graduated. So when I went I was the only black student in the journalism school, too, all the time I was there. But I got along fine. She paved the way for me."¹⁷⁶ And in turn, Bluford would pave the path for others.

Bluford's resolve to read progressed into her desire to write and then her will to protest. She starting working for the *Kansas City Call* (the *Call*), during her summers home from Kansas University. After her college graduation, in 1932, and to the disappointment of *Call* publisher, Charles Franklin, who wanted her to stay at the *Call*, Bluford wanted to work for a daily paper. So, after graduation she went to work for the first black daily newspaper in Georgia, the *Atlanta Daily World*.

In Atlanta, Bluford was horrified by the city's segregated public transportation system. In response, she started walking to all of her story assignments. As established in her youth, Bluford was not opposed to using her feet to show her determination.

¹⁷⁶ Bluford Interview, (May 13, 1989), 21.

Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, she sprained both her ankles and was unable to simultaneously continue working and keep her personal promise to boycott the transit system. So, Bluford went home to Kansas.

Back in Kansas City, Bluford returned to her mentor and previous boss, Charles Franklin, and asked for a job. She was rehired for his first opening a few months later. Bluford never left the *Call* again, and dedicated the rest of her journalistic career, more than 60 years, to the paper.

Arguably, part of Bluford's rapid rise and success can be attributed to her determination to learn. Charles Franklin, Bluford's boss, found a stellar student in Bluford. According to his bio on the newspaper's website, Chester A. Franklin "believed in giving young people a chance to develop. He took them on "green" and trained them to be good newspaper men and women..."¹⁷⁷ Franklin encouraged Bluford's natural inclinations about her community.

Early in her career as a police reporter, Bluford knew that her boss, Franklin, and his friend, the Reverend D.A. Holmes, routinely spoke out about local civic affairs. Bluford once asked if she could accompany Franklin and Holmes as they asserted themselves and their agendas in the local political arena.

"They were a team (Franklin and Holmes). Both of them had loud booming voices, both of them tall, big men. They fought against artificial boundary, housing boundary. They fought for equal housing, they fought for equality in education, in jobs. Frequently they'd go down to see the mayor, City Council people, anybody, if they had something they wanted to get corrected. So I was just starting out and I'd see them go down. I asked if I could go with them, and they said yes. So I tagged along behind them and sort of got my interest in civic affairs through watching them. I did go just to tag along. I learned a lot from both of them."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ <http://www.blackarchives.org/node/104> (accessed on June 3, 2011).

¹⁷⁸ Bluford Interview, (March 19, 1990), 165.

Bluford's learning paid off. In another display of determination, Bluford moved from writing on the police beat (1932) at the *Call* and to within a few years a promotion to city editor and then managing editor in 1937. Upon the death of publisher and editor in chief Charles Franklin in 1955, she said, "I was sort of aggressive and just kind of took over, you know."¹⁷⁹ Thus, Bluford went from beat reporter to editor-in-chief and publisher in fewer than 20 years (1932-1955).

When she wasn't writing and editing for *The Call*, Bluford vacationed at national NAACP conventions. She also served on the NAACP National Board during the 1970s to fill the position of the recently deceased Carl Murphy.¹⁸⁰ Bluford's father, John, initially introduced her to the NAACP. She remained an active member of the organization for most of her life.

Her relationship with the NAACP enabled Bluford to sue the University of Missouri for admittance into their graduate journalism program in 1939. She applied 11 times for entry into the University of Missouri's graduate program in journalism, once every semester, including summers, for four years. Bluford called her initial motivation to test the university's segregated policies as a symptom of her "curiosity disease" but it can also be seen as evidence of her resolve/determination to end segregation. While Bluford and the NAACP lost their suit on the grounds that segregation was still legal, the

¹⁷⁹ Bluford Interview, (March 19, 1990),177.

¹⁸⁰ Carl Murphy, owner and publisher of the *Afro-American* newspaper, is the father of Francis Murphy, one of the other two journalists featured in this research.

judge did mandate that the University of Missouri establish a journalism program at the nearby historically black college, Lincoln University, by February 1941.¹⁸¹

In constant challenge to the “separate but equal” decision handed down in the landmark 1896 case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, civil rights activists continued to contest that accommodations and access to education were not in fact equal. Bluford applied for admittance to the University of Missouri on the heels of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the school had to admit Lloyd Gaines into their law school or create a law school at the nearby Lincoln University. Bluford wanted to both challenge the University of Missouri’s compliance and response to the recent Supreme Court decision and most importantly, compel the school to integrate. The establishment of an undergraduate journalism program at Lincoln University, while a milestone, was not enough for Bluford.¹⁸² Bluford already had an undergraduate degree in Journalism from Kansas University and she wanted admittance to the graduate program at the University of Missouri.

So, despite the segregated dual system, they were almost duty-bound to admit me to the graduate School of Journalism at M.U. but to keep me out—it’s hard to believe--they closed the graduate School of Journalism at Columbia, saying that so many students and so many faculty members had to go to war. It was just the beginning of World War II. And they just kept that school closed.¹⁸³

Disappointed, yet undaunted, Bluford’s reflections on this period illustrate the depth of her determination. She said, in reference to the University of Missouri outcome,

¹⁸¹ The case reached the Missouri Supreme Court and the details can be found under the case name: *State ex. Rel. Bluford v. Canada*. S. W. Canada was the head of the Registrar’s office at the University of Missouri.

¹⁸² Lincoln University’s undergraduate program in journalism educated thousands of African American journalists. Dorothy Gilliam, also one of the three journalists featured in this research, was one. Gilliam, in her interview, noted that she was a beneficiary of Bluford’s fight against the University of Missouri.

¹⁸³ Bluford Interview, (March 19, 1990), 172.

“Oh, you hated to lose. Yeah, you hated to lose. We tried so long to break down that separate but equal business, which was never equal. So, sure you were disappointed but you just keep going, just like in the restaurants and theaters, and things. You just keep fighting until they finally got open.”¹⁸⁴

And keep fighting she did. In the years following the University of Missouri decision, Bluford co-founded an organization partially credited with the enactment of the public accommodations law in Kansas City in 1963. Bluford’s organization, an offshoot of the Committee on the Practice of Democracy, focused primarily on improving interracial relations and the dismantlement of segregation.¹⁸⁵ The small group, comprised of Bluford and 25 to 30 black and white members, pooled their money and resources to also help improve inter-race relations in Kansas City.

Bluford happily spoke of her participation in the organization’s staged sit-ins, a victorious united effort that eventually helped usher in a public desegregation ordinance: “We used to do that pretty regularly, just try these different places. I got a big kick out of it. It didn’t bother me that they turned you down because that’s what you expected. But we didn’t have any violence or anything like that. So that was probably the forerunner of the ordinance. But we had a hard time getting that ordinance (Public Accommodations Law¹⁸⁶) passed.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Bluford Interview, (May 15, 1989), 64.

¹⁸⁵ In 1946, Ruth Brown and several friends in Bartlesville, Oklahoma originally established The Committee on the Practice of Democracy. Brown, a noted librarian and civil rights activist, started this first CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) affiliate group south of the Mason-Dixon line. For more information about Brown and her achievements refer to <http://www.bartlesville.lib.ok.us/aboutlibrary/missbrown.htm>. Last accessed on Nov. 7, 2010.

¹⁸⁶ A law allowing the integration of public establishments, i.e., eating establishments, museums, hotels, sports arenas, etc.

¹⁸⁷ Bluford Interview, (May 15, 1989), 74- 75.

In other displays of determination, Bluford, disappointed after the University of Missouri outcome, regrouped and thrust herself into other protests to increase the status of blacks in Kansas City and the country. In large part she accomplished this through her activity within the NAACP and local civil rights groups.

Bluford credited her unrelenting pursuit for racial equity as her way of remaining hopeful and to ward off personal bitterness. Bluford said that while others had church and other ways to assuage the bitterness that stemmed from oppression, she had her work: “You know, you think it’s ridiculous the way these barriers exist, it’s really silly. But you just keep working at it. I guess working at it keeps you from being bitter.”¹⁸⁸

In 1991, some 50 years after Bluford’s disappointing setback with the University of Missouri, the school awarded her an honorary doctorate. Bluford’s aversion to pomp and circumstance made her reluctant to accept the award. She said that she “didn’t want to be bothered with it” and just “didn’t want to do it.” Bluford ultimately attended the ceremony at the urging of friends.

Bluford’s Spiritual Regeneration Through Her Volunteer Work

In some sense then Bluford’s self-determination aided her spiritual regeneration. She spent her vacations going to NAACP conventions and participated in local civil rights organizations in her spare time. Active membership in political and social organizations offered Bluford camaraderie and a sense of solidarity with like-minded people. The energy created from Bluford’s organizations helped rejuvenate her spirit. As

¹⁸⁸ Bluford Interview, (May 15, 1989),76.

she described it: “You formed friendships or alliances with people you normally wouldn’t come in contact with...[Y]ou can form some lasting friendships that way.”¹⁸⁹

Bluford’s involvement in national and local activist groups served to not only regenerate her spirit but also solidify her connection to her community. Although Bluford spoke little about her father, John H. Bluford, she credited him with learning the importance of sustaining a connection with the national community of civil rights activists. Under the tutelage of Franklin and Holmes, she further learned how to both insert and assert herself in the local community as well. She witnessed and practiced proactive protest and raising one’s voice for change. Bluford’s commitment and connection to her local community and at large lasted her whole life. She attended government meetings where she voiced her discontent over segregation and political injustices. She picketed. She sat in. She spoke out.

¹⁸⁹ Bluford Interview, (August 26, 1989), 105.

Francis Murphy

Timeline:

October 8, 1922: Born in Baltimore, MD

1940: Graduated from Douglass High School

1940-1944: Attended University of Wisconsin (Graduated with a Bachelor's in
Journalism)

1944-1951: Worked as full-time reporter and editor at the Baltimore *Afro-American*

194-:¹⁹⁰ Married James Edward Wood, Sr.

1947: Francis Murphy Wood born (1st child)

1950: James E. Wood, Jr. born (2nd child)

1952-1955: Editor at the Washington D.C. *Afro-American*

1954: Susan Wood born (3rd child)/ Divorced from James Wood, Sr.

1955-1957: City editor of the Baltimore *Afro-American*

1958: Received Bachelor's degree in Education from Coppin State Teacher's College

1958-1963: Taught elementary school while earning a Masters in Education from
John Hopkins University

1967: Murphy's father, Carl Murphy, died

1964-1971: Morgan State College Journalism professor

1971-1975: Served as chair of the *Afro-American*

1975-1984: Journalism professor at Buffalo State College-SUNY

1984-1991: Associate Professor of Journalism at Howard University

1987-1999: Publisher of the Washington D.C. *Afro-American*

¹⁹⁰ No exact date is given in the interview, nor could be found in historical records.

1999: Named Washington D.C. *Afro* publisher emeritus; moved back to Baltimore

1999-2007: Editor and page director of the “If You Ask Me” column

November 21, 2007: Francis Murphy died at age 85

Frances L. Murphy, a newspaper scion, was also a powerful force in reform and protest. Murphy remembered what it was like growing up in a “family focused on a newspaper.”¹⁹¹ Both Murphy’s grandfather and father were editors and publishers of the weekly black newspaper, the Baltimore *Afro-American*, nicknamed the *Afro*. Her interviews reflect a sense of obligation and resolve to the *Afro*. She committed decades of her life to securing the *Afro* as a premiere black newspaper dedicated to defending and protecting its community.

Murphy’s efforts to uphold her heritage demonstrate her self-determination. Similar to Bluford, Murphy’s self determination can be arguably credited to the strength and clarity of her self-definition. The legacy of the newspaper helped define who Murphy was.

Newspaper grooming started early in the Murphy household, and by the age of five Francis sat through newspaper board meetings. Fast forward 25 years and by age 30, she was the first woman publisher and editor of the newspaper.¹⁹² In her 1991 interview for the Washington Press Club, Murphy reminisced about her early experiences at the paper:

From the time I could remember, I was taken to the office of my father. I learned to sit through his meetings, to sit very still. After the meeting he would ask me even from my earliest memories, five, six, and seven, he would

¹⁹¹ Francis L. Murphy, interview by Fern Ingersoll, *Women In Journalism*, (October 25, 1991), 3.

¹⁹² James Wright, "Frances Murphy II, A Black Media Institution, Passes at 85," *Washington Afro-American*, November 26, 2007.

ask me, “What did they say? What did you think of Mr. So and So? And he gave me the opportunity after the meeting to discuss what had happened. But, during the meeting, even if I moved a bit, I can see his glance coming over toward me, shaking his head at me now.”¹⁹³

Francis’ father, Carl Murphy, wanted male children but instead had five girls.

Francis was the youngest. “He had just hoped to have a boy. When he didn’t get a boy, he said, ‘Oh, well. They’ll all go to the newspapers, none of them will stay home to learn to cook and clean.’ And we didn’t.”¹⁹⁴ In his determination to raise strong journalists, Carl Murphy made sure all five of his daughters, especially Francis, had the experience needed to enter the family business. Carl had Francis attend *Afro* board meetings, deliver newspapers, participate in campaigns spearheaded by the paper and attend NAACP meetings. Francis embraced her father’s direction and began to define herself as a journalist.

As part of his training, Carl also assigned Francis and her sisters book reports to be presented during family dinner. Francis remembers deliberately seeking out black-centered literature.

I guess maybe when we got really interested in reading and began to talk about it, he (Carl) made sure we had the kind of books we needed to have to read. They gave me a better perspective on life, and maybe that’s why I felt so good about different things, because very early I read Mary Church Terrell and her writings. I read things that Mary McLeod Bethune¹⁹⁵ had written. So I had a deep appreciation of how these people had struggled and what they were able to do.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Murphy Interview, (October 25, 1991), 1.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Mary Church Terrell was a black women journalist during the Jim Crow era. Mary Mcleoud Bethune was an black women educator who helped start Bethune-Cookman College.

¹⁹⁶ Murphy Interview, (October 25, 1991), 23.

Reading about the lives of other black women aided Murphy in defining herself as a black woman. While the Murphy girls learned about the newspaper business and black-centered literature, they were also taught to protect themselves. Carl Murphy wanted his daughters to be able to defend themselves against pending danger. Francis and her sisters learned to fire guns. In fact, Francis was president of her rifle club in high school.

...[W]e went to the shooting matches all over the place. We learned to handle guns very well. My dad slept with a gun underneath his pillow, and so guns were just accepted in those days. We didn't play with them. We were taught early how to handle them. You knew how to cock, you knew how to shoot, and there wasn't anything to be afraid of. Nothing you would really play with.¹⁹⁷

Carl's tutelage encouraged Francis to also define herself as a Murphy. Early and continuous installments of her parents' expectations contributed to shape how Francis Murphy saw herself and her future. Part of her pre-arranged future as a journalist entailed going to a 'top journalism school.'¹⁹⁸ So, Carl Murphy set his sights on his daughters attending either the University of Minnesota or the University of Wisconsin, in his estimation the best journalism programs in the nation. Unfortunately, Francis' older sister Ida, had trouble getting into the dorms at the University of Minnesota. In response, Carl Murphy contacted the head of journalism at the University of Wisconsin, Dr. Grant Hyde. Carl also made a trip to the school to ensure that his daughters would be received in student housing. Hence, Francis and her three sisters went to the University of Wisconsin and were allowed to live in the dormitory.

¹⁹⁷ Murphy Interview, (October 25, 1991), 29.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 30.

Francis resented going to a predominantly white college while many of her high school classmates went on to HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities.) At the University of Wisconsin, Murphy was one of six black women freshman at the university.

Here I was in a situation where there were just 42 of us all together in a school of 10,000 something, and I guess I made an effort to go to some of the things. I'm sure I did. I don't remember Wisconsin too fondly. I remember Wisconsin as being a chore, as something I had to do. I was resentful that my high school classmates who had gone off on scholarships to schools like Howard, or they went off on scholarships to Spelman and those places, you know. I'd get back home at the holidays, and oh, they were having such a good time. They were doing the same things we were doing in high schools. They were still in the Drum and Bugle Corps, still in the clubs and so forth and so on. I don't remember being too welcomed in any of those things at Wisconsin.¹⁹⁹

Despite her dismal experience at Wisconsin, Murphy graduated in 1944 and headed back home to her family and her family's newspaper. Determined to learn about every aspect of the paper, Murphy took photographs, wrote articles and conducted the business dealings involved in running the *Afro*. Her father, the chief editor, notoriously expected the best out of his reporters and gender was not a determinant for writing assignments and beat responsibilities; Francis was no exception. At one point she was the only police reporter on the paper. She remembered that her father made an effort to assign stories without regard to gender.

I think I was assigned some of the harsh stories because I was a woman and he wanted me to toughen up. In our early days, I can remember that there must have been someone going to the gas chamber or electric chair, one or the other, and a woman reporter from the *Afro* was sent to cover it because he wanted to make sure that there was no discrimination between the women and men.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Murphy Interview, (October 25, 1991), 31, 32.

²⁰⁰ Murphy Interview, (April 25, 1992), 53.

In hindsight, Murphy lauded her father's gender equity policies: "He made sure that you got all the tough assignments just like anybody else. It (gender) didn't make a difference."²⁰¹

The Murphy name held such importance in journalism circles that she held onto her maiden name. To Francis, the Murphy name represented "a feeling of closeness, a feeling that here you have something you can cling to, that means something, and I think the newspaper does that, too."²⁰² Murphy stayed with her newspaper family, working at both the Baltimore and then the Washington D.C. branches of the paper.

During the years post-graduation (1944-1956), Murphy's career soared; she went from full-time reporter to the city editor for the D.C. *Afro*. Murphy was more than just professionally busy, her personal life also flourished. She married James Woods, a fellow editor, and had all of her three children during this time, Francis (1947), James (1950), and Susan Wood (1954).

While the world of journalism initially played an important role in Murphy defining herself, Murphy needed to leave the newsroom to further (re)define herself. After the birth of her third child in 1954, Murphy was divorced from her first husband, James Woods. In 1955, she moved from Washington D.C. back home to Baltimore to work full-time as a columnist and city editor of the *Afro*. For the next three years as Murphy worked at the newspaper, she tried to adjust to life as a single working mother of three children.

²⁰¹ Murphy Interview, (April 25, 1992), 53..

²⁰² Murphy Interview, (October 25, 1991), 6.

A letter from one of Murphy's column readers made her reconsider the effects of her grueling newspaper schedule on her children. Murphy attributes this reader's letter as the catalyst for her hiatus from her newspaper. The letter asked if mothers knew what their children were doing. Something about that question prompted Murphy to reassess the needs of her three young children and her growing responsibilities as a single parent.²⁰³

Carl Murphy was the final push Francis needed to leave the newspaper. While throughout Francis' life Carl Murphy had been adamant about his daughter's pursuit of journalism, when faced with Francis' disposition he encouraged her to leave and do something that would make her happy.²⁰⁴ Carl Murphy knew of his daughter's love for teaching. According to Murphy, her father approached her about leaving the paper:

'Are you interested in going back to school and getting your education degree? Coppin State College has what is called a fifth year.' And I thought about it. He said, 'It will give you more time with the children, and then when they get a little bit older, you can come back to the paper.' And I thought about it. And then of course, he put the caveat in there, 'Okay, I'll pay for it.' So I went back to college, left the office, and spent a year at Coppin State College getting a B.S. on top of my B.A. degree... Dad gave me an allowance and paid the bills.²⁰⁵

In 1958, Murphy received her education degree from Coppin State Teacher's College and started teaching elementary school in the Baltimore public school system. Murphy was a third grade teacher at her daughter's elementary school. Murphy found her new work schedule as more conducive to raising her children. "I was quite happy

²⁰³ Murphy Interview, (April 25, 1992), 64.

²⁰⁴ Murphy Interview, (April 25, 1992), 65.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 64.

teaching.”²⁰⁶ It was Murphy’s love of teaching that helped further define her not only as a journalist but now also as an educator.

Murphy enjoyed teaching elementary school for several years. With the encouragement of her father, Murphy also earned her Master’s degree in education from John Hopkin’s University and then joined the journalism faculty of Morgan State College, an historically black college. “He (Carl Murphy) felt I should get back in the field.”²⁰⁷

From 1964-1971 Murphy soared in her new profession; she earned tenure, received multiple teaching awards and started a program with the *Afro* for budding journalists from the school. Murphy said, “those were great years.”²⁰⁸ In the seven years at Morgan State College Murphy became more self assured and confident in her abilities:

I think you learn when you teach at a black school like that, you get a lot of self-confidence. One of the things that has disturbed me about my own education was that I left high school and went away to Wisconsin, which I didn’t like because of the prejudice. Then you come back to school and you’re one on one with tremendous faculty members who have their Ph.D.s from all the top universities around the world, and then you get a chance to get rid of the race problem all together. There’s no race involved. It’s sort of a leveling, where you get in, you teach, you don’t even think about race, and that’s the kind of experience that every child should have, one that you’d have to just be your own self, either you make it on your own (or you don’t) and there’s no excuse about race or the money or anything. That’s what Morgan did for me.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Murphy Interview, (April 25, 1992), 65.

²⁰⁷ Murphy Interview, (May 23, 1992), 71.

²⁰⁸ Murphy Interview, (April 25, 1992), 66.

²⁰⁹ Murphy Interview, (May 23, 1992), 73.

As a journalist Murphy began to define herself but teaching taught her to believe in herself. Murphy soon needed both her confidence and determination to deal with a striking turn of events. In 1967, Murphy's father died. Suffering from the absence of his leadership and insight, the *Afro* went into a tailspin. After three years of decline, the *Afro* leadership called on Francis to take over as CEO and publisher of the paper. Murphy resigned from Morgan State College and returned to the paper, giving herself two to three years to turn the paper around. And turn it around she did.

After a 13-year sabbatical from the newspaper, Murphy returned to the *Afro* in 1971. When she took over there were 2.3 million subscribers; by the end of 1974, the subscriptions had nearly doubled to 4 million. Murphy's confidence in herself as well as her determination to set the paper back on track saved the *Afro* from ruin. She described how she spearheaded changes at the paper:

What I did when I went into the office and demand that everyone, no matter whether you were switchboard operator or janitor, that you give first-class service. If you didn't, I'd find somebody else to do your job for you, which means people who have coffee breakfasts in the morning, personal telephone calls, ignoring people who come in at the counter, those kinds of things were not needed at the *Afro*. I set up a system of employee evaluation, and evaluated every single employee. I did those kinds of things, took a hard look at the paper, which we're all doing again, at the sloppiness and so forth, little things that had run rampant under John (previous CEO). Not that he wasn't a good man, he was just so busy being friends, he didn't want to be boss. That's all there was to it. I cleaned up the place. From the front to the back, we cleaned house.²¹⁰

While Murphy's skills and determination proved financially beneficial for the paper, her voice in dealing with family members working with her needed honing:

If I had the same respect I have today for the leadership of the company, I think I would have made it. But, unfortunately, those were not very good shining years

²¹⁰ Murphy Interview, (May 23, 1992), 77.

for me, because, as I look back now, I see that I could have turned them around with a little more finesse, a little more compromise, not being so dull-eared as I was, and getting just so fed up and disgusted. I had, unfortunately, my father's attitude, 'Take it or leave it.' I was very harsh. I look back at some of my memos to them, the way I spoke to them, I wanted more from them and didn't get it.²¹¹

Despite her skills and knowledge, Murphy realized that she could have done a better job communicating her ideas and expectations to her family members. And while Murphy did not view her hard-hitting and demanding voice/style as good for human relations, it did resuscitate the paper. With the paper back on track, Murphy kept to her original promise and resigned in 1975.

She took her hard-hitting style back to teaching at SUNY Buffalo from 1975-1984. Murphy then went on to teach at Howard University as an associate professor of journalism. Murphy's demanding style did work in the classroom and helped make her an accomplished teacher. Murphy did not shy away from relaying her high expectations to her students. Murphy used her distinctive voice to teach her students lessons about life and journalism. Murphy's students described her as "tough but fair."²¹²

I would not allow a student to come in my classroom late. I would never accept a late paper. In fact, if you handed me one, I may be inclined to tear it up and give it back to you, because I told them at the beginning of the semester what was expected, and that's what I expected of them. I locked my door. I always loved to have eight o' clock classes, because I locked my door at eight o' clock. You either got there or you didn't come in.

I think what through the years what I really was trying to say to them is, 'If you're going to make it our here, you've got to be better than anybody else.' I think most of them learned that.²¹³

²¹¹ Murphy Interview, (April 25, 1992), 75-76.

²¹² Murphy Interview, (May 23, 1992), 70.

²¹³ Murphy Interview, (August 1, 1992), 147.

Murphy's voice had lasting effects on her students. "I guess the greatest joy I have right now is that when something happens, I get calls from all over the country from my students who are calling me, and they'll begin by, "Let me thank you, first of all, for making me do what I had to do."²¹⁴ Murphy continued to teach and to still keep watch over the *Afro*; her presence was felt in the newsroom and the classroom until her death.

As to Murphy's spiritual rejuvenation, there is not much mention of it during the course of her six interviews. But, Murphy's addendum to her oral history is poignant in this regard. On April 29, 1993, four months after her final interview, Murphy wrote this to the Washington Press Club:

This oral history would not be complete if I did not mention my strong belief in God. I was confirmed at St. James African Episcopal Church (now just St. James Episcopal Church) in Baltimore in 1937. Since that time I have not lived in any city where I have not become a hard working member of a church. I have sung in choirs, been a member of the associate vestry, headed committees, served on the flower guild, the altar guild, and been a Sunday school teacher. But above all, I have been a faithful communicant who believes that you have to live a Christian life inside and outside the church.²¹⁵

Her final words in that interview addendum best summarize her life: "[T]he basic support comes from my immediate family--my sisters, my children, and grandchildren, and the large Murphy clan which has helped the Afro-American newspapers exist these past 100 years."²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Murphy Interview, (May 23, 1992), 70.

²¹⁵ Murphy Interview, (April 29, 1993) Addendum, 161.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

Dorothy B. Gilliam

Timeline:

1936: November 24, 1936, born in Memphis, Tennessee

1951: Father, Adee Conklin Butler, died

1953: Graduated from high school in Louisville, Kentucky

1953-1955: Attended Ursuline College in Louisville, Kentucky (Associate Degree);

Worked at the *Louisville Defender*

1957-1959: Studied journalism at Lincoln University (Bachelor's Degree)

1957 (June-October): Worked for the *Tri-State Defender* in Memphis, Tennessee

1957-1959: Worked for Johnson Publishing Company/*Jet* magazine

1959-1960: Worked for and attended Tuskegee Institute for additional journalism education

1960-1961: Attended Columbia University (Master's degree in Journalism)

Summer 1961: Travelled in association with Operation Crossroads Africa

1961-1965: Full-time reporter for the *Washington Post*

1962: Married Sam Gilliam

1963: Stephanie Gilliam born on May 7

1965: Melissa Gilliam born on August 21

1965-1972: Resigned from the *Post* and worked as a freelance reporter

1967: Leah Gilliam born on February 12

1972-1979: Returned to the *Post* as the assistant editor of "Style" magazine

1979-1990: *Post* columnist

1991-1992: Fellow at the Gannet Center's Freedom Forum

1997-present: Heads Prime Movers Media²¹⁷ at George Washington University

Dorothy Gilliam has led a first and only life. In 1953 she was chosen to be part of the first incoming class of African-American women to integrate Ursuline College in Louisville, Kentucky. Eight years later in 1961, she was the only African-American female in her graduating class at Columbia University. Also in 1961, she was the first full-time African-American woman reporter hired by the *Washington Post* and in 1979 its first and only black woman columnist.

Before all those firsts, Gilliam was the eighth child of the ten children of Adee Conklin Butler and Jessie Mae Norment Butler. Destined to be a habitual harbinger, Dorothy Gilliam's early childhood and adolescence prepared her for a future of milestones. Born in Memphis, Tennessee on November 24, 1936, she was the daughter of an A.M.E (African Methodist Episcopal) minister and a household domestic.

Gilliam's parents worked hard to raise her as a determined and self-defined woman. Most importantly, Gilliam learned and grew from her parents' example. Gilliam witnessed her father working hard to better their community through his work as a minister. He dedicated years to erecting a local A.M.E church building in Louisville, Kentucky.

She was purposely shielded from her mother's work, however. Jessie Mae Butler, Gilliam's mother, worked hard to ensure that her children, especially her daughters, did not follow her path as a maid. As Gilliam recalls, "She (my mother) was always determined that there were certain things I wasn't going to do, and I don't remember her consciously talking about it day after day or anything like that, but, for instance, she

²¹⁷ A program established by Gilliam to help high schoolers interested in journalism team up with students of journalism in college as mentors.

never wanted me to go down and help her down at the place where she was working in the house.”²¹⁸

Unfortunately, in 1951, at age 14, Gilliam also witnessed one of the most harrowing events of her life -- the death of her father:

I was with him when he died, as a matter of fact. My brother and I were going with him. It was a Sunday morning. We were headed to church, one of the churches under him in Shelbyville, Kentucky. We pulled into the service station to get some gas, and my father had a heart attack and died in the service station. It was just the most frightening, fearsome, shattering experience to be there and see that happen.²¹⁹

Minister Butler had been suffering from declining health for years before he died. Gilliam said she suffered too, as she watched her father fight for his life: “When I look back at the relationship between my life and my father’s... as my father got sicker, I got fatter. By the time my father died, I weighed 202 pounds as a 14-year-old. It was almost as though I was holding my breath—the fear. I don’t know, just eating to batten down the feelings and whatever.”²²⁰

In a remarkable show of early self-determination, Gilliam asked her mother to take her to the city hospital so she could get help with her weight. Within eight months, Gilliam lost approximately 60 pounds. By age 16, she had battled her weight and won.

At 17, Gilliam began her long battle against segregation. She started college as part of the inaugural class of black female students integrating Ursuline College in 1953. Gilliam said she felt she was able to take on integration because she was strengthened and educated in a segregated system. “I’m saying one advantage--though there were

²¹⁸ Dorothy Gilliam, Interview by Donita M. Moorhus, *Women in Journalism*, (December 14, 1992), 13.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 12.

²²⁰ Ibid.

many disadvantages--of that system was that the whole element of race was taken away. Everybody was black. The fact that I had that throughout my upbringing, I think it gave me a certain strength in terms of sense of self that I took into integrated situations I went into later.”²²¹

It was in those pivotal, growing years that Gilliam was surrounded, fortified, and reared to see herself as a woman of worth. Gilliam credited black educators and her fellow church members for instilling her with the self-confidence she needed to be a self-defined black woman.²²² High school teachers Mrs. Gearing and Mr. Mumford, encouraged her to pursue a career of her own choosing. Church members reassured Gilliam of her possibilities. “I was being given a lot of encouragement, once again at church. People at church were telling me that I could do whatever it is I wanted to do.”²²³

It is difficult to separate Gilliam’s self-definition from her spiritual regeneration because the two are so intertwined. She was self-defined, in part, because she was spiritually rejuvenated through fellow church members. The church members’ reassurances of Gilliam’s potential shaped how she defined herself. Thus, the two, spiritual regeneration and self-definement worked in tandem to empower Gilliam toward a life of resistance.

Gilliam drew upon her strong sense of self as she acquired more education and began a career. While integrating Ursuline College, Gilliam took an after-school typing job turned reporting job at the *Louisville Defender*, a weekly black paper. At this point she was trying to decide between a career in law or journalism. In 1953 at age 17,

²²¹ Gilliam Interview, (December 15, 1992), 27.

²²² Ibid., 28.

²²³ Ibid.

Gilliam's initiation into the world of journalism as the society editor sealed her career choice.²²⁴

It was that experience (society editor) that pretty much sold me on journalism, and I think that's how law took a back seat. I was able to see how journalism just opened doors. This journalism job had suddenly opened up my world like that, that quickly. I mean, where could it lead? I think even in my relatively young state at that point, it was very clear to me that this was kind of a magic key that had been turned. I think that's what really hooked me on journalism.²²⁵

Officially hooked by journalism and its possibilities, Gilliam was determined to live out her dream of working at a daily paper. After two years at Ursuline College, Gilliam pursued a bachelor's degree in journalism at Lincoln University.²²⁶ She graduated cum laude in June 1957.

After graduation, Gilliam applied to numerous white, mainstream daily papers with no success. She finally accepted a reporting job at another black weekly paper, the *Tri-State Defender* in Memphis, Tennessee. A month after her hire, she "stumbled within a hundred miles of one the biggest stories of that era"²²⁷ -- the integration of Little Rock Central High School, often referred to as the Little Rock Nine.²²⁸ Gilliam's boss, Alex Wilson, editor of the *Tri-State Defender*, went to cover the story leaving specific instructions for the 20-year-old Gilliam to stay in the Memphis office. But, as she said later, "you know I couldn't do that. So as soon as I could, I went to Little Rock as well. I

²²⁴ In 1953, the previous society editor fell ill and Gilliam was asked to fill in until she recovered. The editor remained ill and never returned to work. Consequently, Gilliam became her permanent replacement.

²²⁵ Gilliam Interview, (December 15, 1992), 30.

²²⁶ Lincoln University's Journalism Program was started because of Lucile Bluford's lawsuit against the University of Missouri. Gilliam acknowledged Bluford's part in opening a door for her education.

²²⁷ Gilliam Interview, (February 8, 1993), 44.

²²⁸ In Little Rock, Arkansas, in September 1957, nine black students were attempting to integrate Little Rock Central High School. President Eisenhower eventually had to send in the 101st Airborne Division to protect the students and ensure the integration of the high school.

did all my work in Memphis, and I just had to go. It was like I was being drawn by a magnet. So, against his express orders, I went to Little Rock.”²²⁹

Determined to cover this historical event, Gilliam asked photographer and friend, Ernest Withers, to accompany her. In the end, Gilliam’s rebellious determination enabled her to cover the story her boss was not able to complete. *Tri-State Defender* editor, Alex Wilson, along with several other reporters, was badly beaten by a mob while trying to cover the story. Eventually the attack on him became part of the larger news story.

While covering the Little Rock Nine story, Gilliam met, among others, some of the editors of the black magazine, *Jet*. The *Jet* editors immediately offered Gilliam a job as an associate editor. After only four months at the *Tri-State Defender*, Gilliam moved to Chicago to join the Johnson Publishing Company. At 20 years old, she was the youngest associate editor on staff.

Gilliam found the climate at the magazine different from her previous two journalism positions. In her new role, Gilliam had to rewrite major/mainstream news stories and make them more relevant to the black community. Gilliam’s new editor, Ed “Buck” Clayton was tough. Gilliam described her work environment:

A lot of it was rewrite, so you really were supposed to be quite a smooth writer, and I was definitely learning as I was going. I remember Mr. Clayton once said to me, he said, ‘you write like you’re got concrete in your fingers.’ I remember many a day I would go into the bathroom into the ladies’ stall and cry, ‘Oh, will I ever get this?’ Because they were really rough. They were really hard on you.²³⁰

With the help of family and one colleague, Carter Woodson, Gilliam was encouraged and comforted enough to carry on. Determined to still attain her goal of

²²⁹ Gilliam Interview, (February 8, 1993), 45.

²³⁰ Ibid., 47.

working on breaking stories at a daily newspaper, Gilliam started to plan on how she could leave the ranks of weekly papers:

...[W]hat I started doing, though, was looking around at graduate school, because I knew that, of course, most of the daily newspapers were white papers. There were almost no black dailies, and I realized that I was going to have to have some white credentials, that graduating from Lincoln was not going to get it, that the bias in the newsrooms kind of discounted a school like Lincoln, or at least devalued it. So I was going to have to go to someplace and get a master's at some white school.²³¹

Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism appealed to Gilliam because it offered a practical one-year intensive program. In 1959, Gilliam applied to Columbia and was interviewed but was told that she did not have enough liberal arts credits to qualify for admittance.

More than a decade later, Columbia honored Gilliam as Alumna of the Year. It was then that she also found out, through a faculty researcher, that her initial interviewer commented in his letter to the school about Gilliam's skin color. He had written that she was "a very dark skinned black person." Gilliam said: "It was just an incredibly racist thing, but he felt perfectly comfortable putting this in a letter, and I had no notion of that...those are the kinds of things that happened. Was I told that I didn't have enough liberal arts hours simply to dissuade me from coming? One might say."²³² But, Gilliam was not dissuaded. She was determined.

Gilliam resigned from *Jet* in September 1959 and went to work with her friend, Sam Yette, at the Tuskegee Institute doing public relations. While working at Tuskegee, Gilliam took the additional liberal arts classes Columbia had said she needed.

²³¹ Gilliam Interview, (February 8, 1993), 50.

²³² Ibid., 52.

In a clear show of self-determination and hard work, Gilliam had quit her job, moved from Chicago, started a new job and school: “I was concentrating on getting those hours, going to Columbia, getting a job. Tuskegee was a means to an end, and so between working and then the school and then the classes and the studying, there wasn’t a lot of time.”²³³

A year later in 1960, Gilliam was accepted into Columbia’s graduate program in journalism. Again Gilliam found herself as an only; the only African-American female student in a class of 85. As one of only two African-American students in the program, Gilliam felt she had a lot of learning to do, both academically and socially:

I felt I had a lot of catching up to do, because in many ways it was really making kind of a cultural leap, and I think I became aware of how much more exposure some of these young people had had... Columbia was hard. It was a real challenging situation. It was hard being a minority. Being a black and a woman, having that double burden was hard.²³⁴

Gilliam’s double burden did not go unnoticed by her professors. Professor John Hohenberg told Gilliam, “You know, you’ve got so many handicaps, you’ll probably make it.”²³⁵ And make it she did. Gilliam graduated with her Master’s degree in Journalism from Columbia University in 1961, with her mother and sister in attendance. Despite the challenges, Gilliam reflected on her time at Columbia as a good learning experience. “So with all the difficulties involved as I was going through it, when I look

²³³ Gilliam Interview, (February 8, 1993), 55.

²³⁴ Ibid., 57, 59.

²³⁵ Ibid., 57.

back, in many ways it really was a very seminal experience for me.”²³⁶ Columbia gave Gilliam her “white” credential.

With the help of Columbia’s employment agency, *The Washington Post*, as well as other daily papers, interviewed Gilliam. The *Post* recommended that she “first get a job in the boondocks for a couple of years” while staying in touch. Gilliam was hopeful, she said, because the *Post*’s letter had a different tone than the other rejection letters she had received.

In the summer following graduation, Gilliam participated in an overseas volunteer program, Operation Crossroads Africa.²³⁷ The program called for Gilliam to work alongside fellow African students in various work projects aimed at bettering the community. While Gilliam received a scholarship to help offset some of the cost of her trip, it was still a financial burden. Current boyfriend and future husband, Sam Gilliam, loaned her money. Church members back home, as they had done previously, “sent some money, still these little folded dollars that just represented so much love and caring. My mother did what she could, and it’s just always been a sense of support...she was always supportive of anything I wanted to do. That was another typical thing, where she said she just prayed for me, and all she wanted was to make sure that I wrote on a regular basis.”²³⁸

²³⁶ Gilliam Interview, (February 8, 1993), 60.

²³⁷ Gilliam describes this program as a “precursor to the Peace Corps. Basically, the MO was to take a group of American students and pair them with an equal group of African students, and we did work projects in the summer.”(pg. 60) Gilliam received a scholarship from the African-American Institute for Operation Crossroads. Gilliam helped build a road to the children’s hospital during her tour.

²³⁸ Gilliam Interview, (February 8, 1993), 61.

With the help of loved ones, Gilliam ventured to Nigeria and Kenya in summer 1961. Her travels to Africa helped Gilliam further define herself as a black person.

The trip to Africa was very emotional in many, many ways. First of all, I had never as a black person, been to a place where I saw that many blacks in positions of responsibility... So, it was kind of an awakening, because one of the ways that segregation worked was this whole sense, really, that you just couldn't quite do it, and although I had all this counterwork being done with me since I was a kid about 'you can, you can,' and clearly believed that, because I was doing and opening these new doors and just moving and just withstanding these difficulties, there's still always somewhere this little voice, I guess.²³⁹

Gilliam was commissioned to write about her summer in Africa for two daily papers: the *Louisville Times* and the *Washington Post*. The *Louisville Times* published her articles; the *Post* did not. In hindsight, Gilliam said she thought the *Post* used her articles to give them an idea about her writing skills.²⁴⁰ The *Post* must have been satisfied because they hired her as a general assignment reporter in October 1961. Gilliam would need her defining experience in Africa for the challenges she faced as a reporter at the *Washington Post*.

The segregation of Washington D.C. prevented Gilliam from getting cabs because drivers just assumed she was going to the black part of town: "I can remember standing out on corners waving and waving. I know as a black woman it was extraordinarily hard for me to just to move around and do my job. I can remember standing on the streets corners and just crying, you know, just totally frustrated because often the deadline was ticking away, and cabs were just whizzing past me."²⁴¹

²³⁹ Gilliam Interview, (February 8, 1993), 62.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 69.

When Gilliam did get back to the newsroom, she was faced with a hostile environment. There were no real allies or colleagues with whom she could share her experiences; she called it her “silent misery.”²⁴² Gilliam’s co-workers also refused to acknowledge her outside of the newsroom. Gilliam pressed on, but the years of hostility and isolation left their mark:

I’ve tried to work to get rid of some of that kind of pain from those years in my work today. Some of those memories are still there, and I try to bury them where they belong, but the truth is that some of those memories are there, because they were really very painful. What one does, especially since there are so many issues, is that one internalizes that, and then you assume, ‘Obviously, there’s something wrong with me.’ When we know now, of course, I can put it in the larger context and I know all these various factors that are at work, but there were really some very, very difficult times.²⁴³

Amid those difficult times, Gilliam had moments of light and life. In 1962, she married her longtime sweetheart, Sam Gilliam, at her father’s church in Louisville, Kentucky. Almost a year later, on May 7, 1963 she gave birth to the first of three daughters, Stephanie Jessica Gilliam. While on maternity leave from April to September, Gilliam attended the March on Washington.²⁴⁴ Back at work in September, Gilliam continued to cover and write about many of the other seminal moments in civil rights history.

A year earlier, in 1962, she had covered James Meredith’s integration of Ole’ Miss (University of Mississippi). Gilliam had again called on her old friend, Ernest Withers from the *Tri-State Defender*, to help with the story. Gilliam knew she would

²⁴² Gilliam Interview, (March 17, 1993), 68.

²⁴³ Ibid., 70.

²⁴⁴ On August 28, 1963 approximately 200,000 Americans from all over the country participated in a civil rights march in Washington D.C. at the Lincoln Memorial. The keynote address was given by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. He gave his famous, “I Have a Dream” speech.

need her friend to help her be safe and smart in the hostile area. With no rooms left in local hotels, due to the magnitude of the event, Withers and Gilliam lodged at a local black funeral home. There she uncovered another story--the death of a black man found on the railroad tracks in Oxford, Mississippi. The local residents said the death was a “message to the black community to watch themselves.”²⁴⁵

Years later, Gilliam’s story about the death of the Oxford, Mississippi man was challenged by public officials at the 25-year anniversary of Ole Miss. “This story is one I’ve told before, because it just has such poignancy for me. In fact, I told it 25 years later when I went to Mississippi. They were having a 25-year reunion of people who had covered the civil rights movement, and my story was challenged by an official of the University of Mississippi, but I hold to my story.”²⁴⁶

Gilliam was determined to tell and defend the untold stories. She was self-defined enough to defend her experience and that of others. She was determined enough to report and work despite personal jeopardy. Gilliam continued to pursue the breaking stories. At the request of her friend Withers, she interviewed civil rights activist and NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers. Her interview would be one of his last. He was assassinated in front of his home only a few months later.²⁴⁷ Protest and martyrdom surrounded Gilliam in the early 1960s. In November 1963, Gilliam reported on President John F. Kennedy’s death and funeral.

²⁴⁵ Gilliam Interview, (March 17, 1993), 75.

²⁴⁶ Ibid..

²⁴⁷ Medgar Evers was appointed NAACP’s first field secretary in 1954. He worked to end segregation in Mississippi. He was murdered by Byron D. La Beckwith on June 12, 1963.

In the midst of reporting on protest, poverty, and death, Gilliam wanted to relish life, especially the life of her daughter. The extensive work hours stripped away her time as a mother. In her resolve to secure more time with her child, Gilliam found her stronger, louder voice. "...I was finding myself being kind of unhappy personally, being unable to spend time with my daughter. I'm a person who, while I consider myself aggressive as a reporter, I have never been that great at fighting for myself, but I found myself fighting when I thought I was not going to be able to have any time with my daughter."²⁴⁸

Gilliam asked her boss, the assistant city editor, if she could start working part-time. He said no. Gilliam kept working but realized that she was suffering; "shocked at the grief" she was feeling about "leaving her daughter and not seeing her."²⁴⁹ Gilliam summoned up her voice again and asked for part-time work. This time her request was granted but after a short while the offer was retracted.

In 1965, she took maternity leave for the birth of her second daughter, Melissa, but this time she did not come back to the *Post*. For the next seven years, 1965-1972, she worked as a freelance reporter, taught at Howard and American Universities, worked for Channel 5 television and gave birth to her third daughter, Leah Kathryn. Gilliam's self-made mosaic of journalism jobs enabled her to still have the career she wanted and still have the time she desired with her daughters.

In 1972, the *Post* came calling. Gilliam was offered an assistant editor position of the "Style" section of the paper. Her daughters older now, Gilliam accepted and found

²⁴⁸ Gilliam Interview, (March 17, 1993), 77.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

that she wasn't coming back to the same newsroom she had left seven years previously. "In many ways it was much easier being back in the '70s. First of all, the city was more integrated. There were more African-American reporters on the paper, some black women--glory be!"²⁵⁰ Gilliam may have been relieved to have more women of color present in the newsroom but her position still made her the first and only:

I was the only black editor, the first black one back there. What they did was to give each of us a cluster of reporters with whom we worked. I sort of saw what I wanted [as] my goal, to bring some coherence to black culture, so I was able to make a number of hires and get a lot of, I thought, interesting things into the newspaper. Unfortunately, some people at the paper seemed to think we were doing too many black stories.²⁵¹

By 1978, Gilliam needed a change. The paper's disapproval of the direction of her "Style" section served as a catalyst. After tossing around ideas with her editor, Gilliam decided to try column writing. As a working audition, Gilliam first worked for the "Metro" section. Within a few months, Gilliam was writing her own column.

When Gilliam started writing her column in 1979, she could not have guessed how the column would contribute to the development of her voice. The column even helped her get through personal difficulties, especially when Gilliam and her husband separated and eventually divorced.

...[C]ertainly, once the separation took place, I was trying to find—I call it my 'reself,' and part of that was getting my voice back and having a voice. Then as I said, the column shifted, because after awhile I wasn't satisfied simply doing those 'people' pieces. I felt they were too soft. I wanted to be able to have something to say on problems, issues like racism, like a lot of the problems in the city. I think after that difficult period, the column started getting a lot better, I would say.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Gilliam Interview, (March 17, 1993), 80.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Gilliam Interview, (March 17, 1993), 90.

After almost two decades with the *Washington Post*, Gilliam left the paper in 1990 and continued her journey in journalism through academia.²⁵³ When interviewed in 2011, she led the Prime Movers Program at George Washington University,²⁵⁴ a journalism mentorship program targeting urban schools. The program sends veteran journalists and university interns to mentor high school students.

Throughout her life, Dorothy Gilliam defined and (re) defined herself. Her determination, while at times shaken, was not thwarted. Gilliam's determination allowed her to be the first and only many times over. Her voice grew louder and more resistant with every challenge, both personally and professionally.

In the end, looking back, she attributes her faith in God as the most empowering element in her life. "As I look back and I see the grace in so many ways. I drifted, I did this, I did that. But I think that's one of the things (faith in God) that gave me the values that helped me to succeed."²⁵⁵

Gilliam believed that she could not have made it through the hurt and disappointment if she had not been bolstered by her religious beliefs. Growing up in the church and gaining a spiritual backbone provided Gilliam with her self-determination and self-defining nature. "If I had not had the values that told me that I'm a child of God and I was made in the image of God -- I don't think I was necessarily seeing it like that at the time, but I look back on my life, in so many ways I see those lessons that I learned from

²⁵³ Further analysis of how Gilliam used her voice through her column articles is discussed in chapter 4.

²⁵⁴ (<http://www.primemoversmedia.org/>)

²⁵⁵ Dorothy Gilliam, Interview by Fatimah Salleh, *Empowered Women Resist: Three Black Women Journalists in the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (April 2011) 3.

those early days were the sustaining force through some really, really incredible experiences.”²⁵⁶

Religious teachings and convictions offered spiritual rejuvenation for Gilliam.

People, too, played a part in Gilliam’s spiritual regeneration:

...I just feel like so much grace has surrounded me. A lot of people in my life who have helped me, have shown me, taken me by the hand, that’s been--looking back now, I can see those things were not happenstance. So I think there have been some wonderful, wonderful people who have been a part of the--I would say like a family or a community that have surrounded me.²⁵⁷

In short, Gilliam served her community and they served her.

²⁵⁶ Dorothy Gilliam, Interview by Fatimah Salleh, *Empowered Women Resist: Three Black Women Journalists in the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (April 2011) 3.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., (April 2011) 1. [Part 2].

Chapter 5: *Black Ink*

“No black woman writer in this culture can write “too much.” Indeed, no woman writer can write “too much”...No woman has ever written enough.”

--bell hooks²⁵⁸

In this chapter, I expand on the themes of voice and connection to community by analyzing Bluford’s, Murphy’s and Gilliam’s editorials and columns. I use three theories: black feminism, alternative media, and ethnic media to conceptualize what the women wrote for public consumption. The topics of the articles and columns the women wrote are viewed as a manifestation of each journalist’s voice and what she thought was important in connecting and developing her community.

All three journalists worked, at some point, for the black press, an alternative media source. As black press journalists, the women wrote with two goals: (1) to communicate with the black community and its supporters (intra-group) and/or (2) to convert or persuade others to join their cause(s) (extra-group). Extra-group communication could also serve as a forum in which to vent frustration and disappointment with mainstream principles, practices, and people.²⁵⁹ Gilliam’s columns as well as Bluford’s and Murphy’s editorials were also

²⁵⁸ bell hooks, *remembered rapture: the writer at work* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), 12.

²⁵⁹ Dorothy Gilliam is the only journalist in this study who left the ranks of the black press to join the mainstream/white press. Gilliam said that her column in the *Washington Post* was directed to all readers regardless of race: “I really resent the idea of writing to tell white people about black people.” Gilliam’s column, nevertheless, did take on the features and functions of an ethnic medium. In fact, Gilliam’s editor at the *Washington Post*, after 18 years of the column, told her: “You write too much about race” and hinted at the

paper's desire for Gilliam to step down. Since many of Gilliam's columns were about racial topics they took on some of the key characteristics of ethnic media and thus were analyzed as such.

evaluated according to their purpose(s). Were the women writing to serve: (1) an informational function to both inform and mobilize the community to participate in community events; (2) as collective expressions of anger/frustration at injustice; (3) as sentinel and/or watchdog warning the community against external threat(s); and/or (4) as community booster by providing comfort and respite from negative images in the mainstream press? After the life stories described in Chapter Three it is easier to understand why Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam chose to use their voices to highlight topics especially important to them. Bluford routinely wrote about the NAACP; Murphy concentrated on education; Gilliam emphasized matters of race.

The Voice of Lucile Bluford in the *Kansas City Call*

Lucile Bluford took over as editor in chief for the *Call* when owner and publisher Chester A. Franklin died in 1955. More than 200 of Bluford's weekly editorials written from 1956-1961 were analyzed for this research. Bluford's editorial always ran toward the end of the paper under a box headlined: "The *Call*'s Platform" that included the statement:

The *Call* believes that America can best lead the world away from racial and national antagonisms when it accords to every man, regardless of race, color or creed, his human and legal rights. Hating no one man, fearing no man. The *Call* strives to help every man in the firm belief that all are hurt as long as anyone is held back.²⁶⁰

Lucile Bluford's editorials reveal that she spoke both to and for her community. Bluford's editorials on voting are an example of how she communicated to her community (intra-group). When she wrote about voting, Bluford educated her readers about the issues and how certain bills and laws could impact their community, an example of the sentinel/watchdog function of ethnic media. When Bluford asked them to take full advantage

²⁶⁰ Editorial Head of the *Call*

of their right to vote she exemplified ethnic media's information function. Almost as frequently Bluford wrote editorials that served the community booster function.

Approximately 1 out of every 15 editorials Bluford wrote were dedicated to positive stories about black Americans in the local and national community.

Bluford's Voting Voice

When motivating her readers to action, Bluford focused on voter education and voter turnout. Bluford's ongoing campaigns for various charities, also served both to inform and motivate. In a quintessential two-part editorial on January 25, 1957, Bluford addressed both topics. The first part was headlined, "Help Finish the Job," and focused on raising money for polio survivors through the March of Dimes:

January is almost over. If you have not already sent your dimes or dollars to the March of Dimes, do it today! Don't let the month slip by without helping to 'Finish the Job.'

The Salk vaccine will help to control polio in the future but thousands of polio victims who were crippled by the disease before the preventive drug was discovered need your help. They need medical care and rehabilitation projects.²⁶¹

The second half of the editorial with the subhead, "Getting Out the Vote," urged Americans to take advantage of their right to vote:

The ballot is such a precious thing that Americans should stop treating it so lightly. Somewhere along the line in our American system we have failed to instill in our people a full understanding and deep appreciation of the right of suffrage. In our own country, women fought for years for the right to vote. Negro citizens in some parts of the Southland still are struggling for the privilege of voting.²⁶²

²⁶¹ Editorial, *The Call*, January 25, 1957.

²⁶² Ibid.

Bluford wrote often about voting. Not only did she write to encourage voter turnout, she tried to motivate her readers by telling them why they should vote. In the editorial, “Register, or You Can’t Vote!” Bluford voiced her passion about voting:

Wars have been fought, Constitutional amendments have been passed and bitter legislative battles have been waged over a man’s right to be represented in his government. The right to select one’s representation in free elections, and to participate in decisions that affect him, is one of the most important features of our democratic system.

Don’t be a civic slacker! Register now! And express yourself in terms of whatever your preference may be.²⁶³

Although in that editorial Bluford told readers to vote according to their preferences, in other editorials she directed them more explicitly on how to vote.²⁶⁴ Bluford’s editorials about voting followed a template and had a cadence:

Hearings will be held in Jefferson City next week on two bills of vital importance to the progress of the state of Missouri. Both pertain to discrimination in the employment of Missouri citizens.

House Bill No. 161 would eliminate racial discrimination by private employers of six persons or more by employment agencies and labor unions. House Bill No. 164 prohibits state agencies from drawing the color line in selecting employees.

Both bills should pass! Citizens throughout the state should plan to attend the hearings on February 27. Those unable to go should send telegrams and letters to their legislators urging support of both bills. A state progresses as all of its citizens progress. These two bills are a means to that end.²⁶⁵

Notice that Bluford answered the where, the what, and the why. She then stated her opinion and urges readers to take action. Her April 20, 1956 editorial was dedicated to a \$27 million dollar educational bond issue:

²⁶³ Editorial, *The Call*, August 31, 1956.

²⁶⁴ Note that the article is written using male pronouns—this was the approved style of the time.

²⁶⁵ Editorial, *The Call*, February 22, 1957.

New school buildings are possible only through bond issues. All of our old buildings cannot be replaced at once, but with the passage of each bond issue, more progress can be made. The school building program should be carried on at a steady, consistent pace with some construction going on all the time. This can be made possible if citizens interested in their schools, their children and their communities will go to the polls on May 1 and vote 'Yes.' It will only take a minute of your time, but it will mean years of happiness and opportunity for the little fellows who spend most of their waking hours in the classroom.²⁶⁶

Bluford informed readers about how to vote not only in the voting booth but also with their dollars and time. In a February 1956 editorial, Bluford specifically called on teachers to contribute to a lawsuit initiated by 11 black school teachers. The Moberly School system, upon integrating its student body, dismissed all 11 of its black teachers because "Negro teachers would not be used in an integrated set-up."²⁶⁷ This editorial stands out because Bluford targets a specific group of people (teachers) to offer aid and asks for a specific donation amount of \$5.

We urge teachers, white and Negro, to make a contribution to this cause of democracy. If every teacher who received a letter from the special Missouri Teachers Legal Aid committee would send in a contribution of only \$5, the court costs in the Moberly case would be more than paid for and there may be something left for suits in other cities. Any teacher in Missouri can afford to send \$5 to help a fellow teacher and at the same time register his protest against the undemocratic procedure of discharging qualified teachers solely on account of their race.²⁶⁸

Bluford's Voice for Funds

During the late 1950s and early 60s, Bluford's fund-raising editorials generally focused on supporting local and national civil rights protests. Hence, these writings are a good example of the information function of ethnic media. It is in these editorials that Bluford informs her readers about national and local civil rights efforts. Bluford urged her

²⁶⁶ Editorial, *The Call*, April 20, 1956.

²⁶⁷ Editorial, *The Call*, February 17, 1956.

²⁶⁸ Editorial, *The Call*, February 17, 1956.

readers to support the protests with donations. Just before Christmas in 1956, Bluford asked her community to give a financial present to the Montgomery Bus Boycotters:

The citizens of Montgomery have given an effective demonstration of the effective power of passive resistance. Not a blow has been struck in the year-long protest at Montgomery. The non-violent approach has proved powerful.

The courage and the determination of the Montgomery people have been lauded by Negro citizens all over the country during this past year. Now those who have been loud in their praise by word of mouth have an opportunity to show in a tangible way how much they admire the boycotters. It would be a fine tribute to the men who chose to walk if tens of thousands of persons would send them a Christmas present of a few dollars each.²⁶⁹

Five years later in 1961, Bluford asked for donations to support another group of bus activists—The Freedom Riders. In an editorial aptly headlined, “Freedom is Costly,” Bluford explained why this cause and others akin to it deserved the community’s support:

The Freedom Riders and sit-in demonstrators who preceded them have performed a great service to American democracy. Many doors, lunch counters and bus terminal waiting rooms have been opened as a result of their efforts which may have remained closed for many more months, perhaps years, had they not staged their dramatic protests.

Freedom is costly, but it is worth every cent and every dollar that must be spent to bring America’s practices in line with her principles.²⁷⁰

The lead of the editorial sums up Bluford’s passion and justification for her persistent petitioning for funds: “It costs money—real money—to win freedom,” she wrote.²⁷¹ She then described the cost of the Freedom Rides—a \$282,000 venture and climbing. Bluford itemized how the tens of thousands of dollars had been spent: “cost of bails bonds, legal fees, legal expenses, travel for Freedom Riders to stand trial, training for the Riders, hospital bill,

²⁶⁹ Editorial, *The Call*, December 14, 1956.

²⁷⁰ Editorial, *The Call*, November 17, 1961.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

telephone calls, telegrams and printing.”²⁷² This editorial showed just how costly it was to mount a non-violent protest.

Although, Bluford’s editorials frequently requested funds, sometimes she asked for something different. When the U.S. government launched a back-to-school campaign, Bluford extended a stronger invitation to her community: “We especially urge Negro youth to stay in school as long as they can.”²⁷³

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. underwent surgery due to a violent knife wound to the chest, Bluford again asked her community for help, in the form of united prayer: “We call on churches everywhere to join together in prayer next Sunday morning for Dr. King’s recovery.”²⁷⁴ Note that both articles use the plural pronoun, “we,” establishing intra-group communication.

In 1960, she asked parents to boycott the annual PTA (Parents Teacher Association) picnic held at Fairlyland. The amusement park was closed to blacks 364 days a year but made a one-day exception for the annual PTA fundraising event:

Staying home from an afternoon of pleasure is a small sacrifice that the parents of Kansas City are being asked to make in comparison with physical attacks and jail sentences being heaped upon young people of the South who are standing for a principle.

The PTA sponsors picnics as money-making efforts. While Negro parents appreciate the PTA’s need for money and have an interest in the PTA program, they have a deeper concern for the welfare of their children. It’s too bad that the PTA cannot think of another project, which in addition to making money, would teach the children of both races the meaning of democracy.²⁷⁵

²⁷² Editorial, *The Call*, November 17, 1961

²⁷³ Editorial, *The Call*, August 30, 1957.

²⁷⁴ Editorial, *The Call*, September 21, 1958.

²⁷⁵ Editorial, *The Call*, May 13, 1960.

Bluford Backs the NAACP

Of all the groups and causes Bluford lent her voice to, one she referenced the most—the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). Arguably, Bluford’s support toward the NAACP stemmed from her own long-time membership and leadership positions in the organization. Bluford’s NAACP editorials straddle three ethnic media functions—they inform and motivate, serve as a community booster as well as a sentinel. An example of the community booster aspect of her NAACP editorials is when Bluford credited the organization for certain civil rights milestones: “The NAACP is the target of the segregationists because it’s responsible for the U.S. Supreme Court decision declaring segregated schools illegal.”²⁷⁶

Bluford gave credit where credit was due and defended the NAACP against blame. In response to the White Citizen’s Council’s claim that the NAACP was to blame for the rock ‘n’ roll craze, Bluford wrote a “More Credit Than It Deserves” editorial: “We’ll admit the NAACP has done a good job along many lines, but this week it got more credit that it deserves. The NAACP is a pretty powerful organization alright, but it isn’t strong enough to influence music trends of the country.”²⁷⁷

Bluford’s constant coverage, approximately 1 out of every 20 editorials, of the NAACP made the organization a part of *The Call*’s news agenda. Her voice helped raise money and awareness for its causes.

²⁷⁶ Editorial, *The Call*, October 5, 1956.

²⁷⁷ Editorial, *The Call*, April 6, 1956.

Bluford's Community Boosting

When she was not promoting bills, bonds, charities, and the NAACP, Bluford was highlighting members of the black community. Those editorials functioned as a community booster offering black readers a positive look inside their community. In the five years of editorials analyzed Bluford spotlighted individuals almost as often as she talked about voting. She lauded and supported national black heroes such as Joe Louis, Jackie Robinson, the Little Rock 9 and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.²⁷⁸

Bluford gave just as much attention and praise to local blacks who were breaking barriers. There was pride in Bluford's voice as she applauded the first black airline stewardess for TWA, Mary E. Tiller, and a record-setting typist, Cortez Peter. In acknowledging the Reverend D.A. Holmes, Bluford wrote:

The Rev. D.A. Holmes is like a sturdy oak in this community. For 35 years, he has been on the firing line participating in civic battles, always with the good of the people as a whole in mind. The Rev. Mr. Holmes has not confined his activities to issues of primary interest to Negroes but has taken the broad view. His concern has been for the human family.

Like an oak, the Paseo Baptist pastor seems to get stronger and sturdier with age. At 80, he is as stalwart as a man many years his junior. And he is not ready to quit yet. Having reached four score, the able minister and civic leader may well go on now to be 90, or even 100. More power to him.²⁷⁹

In 1957, Bluford extolled Martin Luther King Jr. with similar accolades:

Martin Luther King stands as a symbol of ministerial leadership at its best. In the midst of a wave of violence and defiance of law and order in the South, he came forth with his non-violent approach to the segregation problem in Montgomery. Ministers in other southern cities, inspired by his leadership, adopted the same method.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Editorial, *The Call*, August 29, 1958.

²⁷⁹ Editorial, *The Call*, September 28, 1956.

²⁸⁰ Editorial, *The Call*, March 22, 1957.

Bluford highlighted groundbreaking individuals and groups alike. In an editorial entitled “Science Fair Explodes Myth,” she applauded a teacher at Sumner High School in Kansas City, KS:²⁸¹

The myth that Negroes do not have the mental capacity to grasp the intricacies of physics, electronics, higher mathematics and the like continues to be exploded every day.

In Kansas City, the Science Fair each year gives concrete evidence that brainpower is the exclusive property of no one group. By consistently winning the top awards in this city-wide event, Negro students keep proving over and over again that race is an incidental factor in learning and that it is individual ability, merit, and interest which count.

Sumner High School of Kansas City, Kas. has had more than its share of winners in the Greater Kansas City Science Fair.

In previous years, the top winners who were Negroes came almost without exception from Sumner High School where William W. Boone, sponsor of Sumner’s winners, is an outstanding teacher of science who takes more than an ordinary interest in his students and their scientific development. During the six years that the Science Fair has been in existence, Boone has produced four top winners. Sumner has had eight top award winners. A remarkable record!²⁸²

Thus, Bluford’s combination of microscopic and telescopic vision focused on black achievers in Kansas City as well as those in the larger struggle for civil rights and black empowerment. In one editorial, Bluford referred to the Montgomery bus boycotters as “those spunky Alabamans.” She admired their stamina in persevering with the bus boycott and wrote, “It looks as if a southern city is going to show us how to fight for our rights. More power to the people of Montgomery! We glory in their spunk.”²⁸³

Whether a neighboring high school or the valiant citizens of Montgomery, Bluford’s praise and support had a wide scope. Bluford empowered her community by using her voice

²⁸¹ Sumner High School was a segregated, predominantly black school in Kansas City, Kansas.

²⁸² Editorial, *The Call*, April 26, 1957.

²⁸³ Editorial, *The Call*, February 10, 1956.

to both recognize the neighbor next door and national figures. She applauded individuals and the power of the collective. She spoke about the small steps and the great leaps forward.

Bluford's Reproach

Bluford's readers were the target of both prodding and encouragement. Those considered oppositional to the cause often garnered her disappointment and sometimes unabashed criticism. Bluford used her editorials as a form of extra group communication and as a collective expression of frustration and anger. In one of several editorials directed to President Eisenhower about the wave of violence surrounding the court decision legally mandating integration, Bluford told Eisenhower to "Speak up, Ike, and express yourself."²⁸⁴

In another article, she drove her point home:

Violence continues to flare up in the South over the issue of integration, but President Eisenhower still says nothing. Two weeks ago, we called upon the President to speak out against the wave of terror against Negroes in the Southland who are attempting to carry out the U.S. Supreme Court decision. This week, the N.A.A.C.P asks Ike to condemn the action of bigots who are defying the law of the land.

Yet, Ike remains silent. He says nothing against the dynamiting of homes and churches. It is reported that he has asked the Justice Department for advice. He shouldn't need anyone to advise him to condemn violence against law-abiding citizens.²⁸⁵

In her January 27, 1956 editorial, Bluford told J. Edgar Hoover, head of the F.B.I, that his treatment of the Emmett Till case disappointed black people.²⁸⁶ In another editorial, Bluford took on the Kansas City Mayor Bartle and the councilmen, who she said were lax in their treatment of a resolution "asking consideration of an ordinance to make it unlawful for

²⁸⁴ Editorial, *The Call*, September 27, 1957.

²⁸⁵ Editorial, *The Call*, February 1, 1957.

²⁸⁶ Editorial, *The Call*, January 27, 1956.

places of public accommodation to discriminate against persons because of race.”²⁸⁷ She continued her admonitions:

We citizens do not question our public officials enough. We elect them. They are put in office to serve us. They are accountable to us and are duty-bound to answer our questions. We need not apologize for asking about any matter of public interest. Passage of an ordinance such as the one recommended by the Human Relations Commission would be good for Kansas City—and our country. What about it, Mr. Mayor and Councilmen?²⁸⁸

Bluford called any and all to task. When she disapproved of an individual’s actions, she held nothing back. On May 10, 1957, Bluford called the Imperial Wizard Eldon Edwards, head of the Ku Klux Klan, “a pitiful spectacle.”²⁸⁹ Bluford lambasted Edwards’ responses in an interview with ABC-TV newsman Mike Wallace.

The “wizard,” a man named Eldon Edwards from the state of Georgia, was a pitiful figure as he tried to answer the pointed questions put to him by Wallace. He was ignorant enough to think he was scoring, but he fumbled every point.

Under Mike Wallace’s questioning, Edwards and the Ku Klux Klan became a bigger joke, more of a laughing stock than they had ever been before. No wonder the Klan has declined in influence. Even the deep South, that part which is rabid on the race question, cannot tolerate the utter stupidity of the Eldon Edwardses which make up the Klan.²⁹⁰

Lucile Bluford’s editorials offer insight into her passions, concerns, and frustrations. Manifested through her editorials, Bluford clearly voiced her intolerance toward injustice, her commitment to civil rights, and her drive to mobilize her community. Her connection to her community was evident in every editorial and exemplified the core functions of ethnic media. As a sentinel, she wrote about injustice. She also mobilized and motivated her readers

²⁸⁷ Editorial, *The Call*, June 13, 1958.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Editorial, *The Call*, May 10, 1957.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

to vote, donate, and act. In addition, she made sure to highlight the commendable citizens within the community.

Dorothy Gilliam's Voice in the *Washington Post*

As the only African-American woman journalist in this study to have worked both in the black press and the mainstream white press, Dorothy Gilliam's column can be seen as a reflection of her voice addressing two disparate audiences. Gilliam took her skills and training from the black press and applied them in her column for the predominantly white mainstream newspaper, the *Washington Post*. As the sole black woman columnist for the *Post*, Gilliam's writing reflected the seriousness with which she took her role. Gilliam's voice is clear in her more than 500 columns. Her words and message for nearly 20 years were deliberate and calculated. In her column, Gilliam addressed the need for racial parity and understanding. At times she cajoled her audiences with stories of triumph and success. Her column regularly focused on extra-group communication with the intent to mobilize and educate her predominately white readers. Some columns also were examples of Gilliam's intra-group communication as she specifically addressed her fellow black citizens.

Four key themes emerge in Gilliam's columns. First, matters of race are central. These writings on race straddle both intra and extra-group communication because Gilliam switched points of view in many of these columns. Gilliam also liked to highlight individuals making a difference within the community. These columns, although published in a mainstream paper, exhibit the characteristics of the community booster function in ethnic media theory. Gilliam also confronted gender issues such as abortion and marriage and she wrote extensively about education.

Gilliam's commitment to illuminating these issues in the context of race can be seen as an example of an ethnic media source inside a mainstream, white newspaper. Gilliam's columns repeatedly offered a glimpse into the black plight and challenged her predominantly white audience to "see" outside their world. She simultaneously offered a voice for black citizens in a medium in which they were virtually invisible otherwise. Gilliam's column can be seen as one woman's campaign to create a dialogue of racial understanding and activism.

Gilliam Boosts Blacks

The most frequent theme in Gilliam's column was an exploration into the triumphs and trials of black life. Her spotlights on the men and women who triumphed despite prevailing obstacles provided "comfort and respite from negative images in the mainstream press." For example, Gilliam explained in one column why Karen Stevenson, the first black woman to be awarded a Rhodes scholarship, was noteworthy: "When a young woman who grew up just across the street from this stereotypical inner-city environment wins the crème de la crème of academic honors and she is partly a product of the much censored District of Columbia public school system, the irresistible question is how she accomplished it."²⁹¹

In her October 25, 1982 column, Gilliam wrote about a local D.C. man, Donald Streater's highs and lows in his fight to stay sober. Gilliam called Streater's story "special," because "for every success in the battle against booze and heroin, there are innumerable tragedies." Gilliam ended on Streater's story of redemption with his words of hope, "'If I can pass something on, if it can help—I want to take it from under the table and put it on the table,' he says. 'The key I've been searching for I've finally found. Sharing some of those

²⁹¹ Dorothy Gilliam, "First Black Woman Rhodes Scholar Senses No Limitations," *The Washington Post*, C1, September 9, 1979.

things that people think are weaknesses are my strengths, because knowing where you're weak and dealing with that makes you strong."²⁹²

Although the majority of Gilliam's spotlight columns praised their subjects, Gilliam was not one to withhold reproach. Marion Barry's feat of having become D.C.'s first black mayor, did not exempt him from Gilliam's scrutiny. In one of the several columns she dedicated to evaluating Mayor Barry's tenure, Gilliam criticized him for his lack of accountability in a case of missing financial records:

While it is understandable that Barry the man would by now be running on a short fuse, and does not want to take responsibility for the shortcomings of people in his administration, Barry the politician is indeed responsible for the people who keep records of the public's money. For while there may have been nothing illegal about the way the funds were spent although the records are missing, at the very least they smack of incompetent management.²⁹³

Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, on the other hand, earned Gilliam's accolades. In this column, Gilliam spoke on behalf of a larger and global black community. Her lead says it all: "Thanks, Nobel Committee. *We* needed that. With the awarding of the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize to Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, the international community has illuminated the struggle of 22 million black South Africans. It has brought a message to the world that it is hoped won't be lost on American voters..."²⁹⁴ In this piece, Gilliam also uses her veneration of Tutu to indict America's lack of outrage.

In an attempt to energize the American community to do something about the situation in South African, Gilliam explored the oppressive, violent, and racist policies inflicted on black South Africans. She condemned the Reagan administration for idly

²⁹² Dorothy Gilliam, "Climbing Back," *The Washington Post*, B1, October 25, 1982.

²⁹³ Dorothy Gilliam, "A Question Hanutning Barry," *The Washington Post*, D3, September 10, 1987.

²⁹⁴ Dorothy Gilliam, "Bishop Tutu's Message," *The Washington Post*, B3, October 22, 1984.

standing by and doing nothing to protest the atrocities. Gilliam expressed hope that the honor bestowed upon Bishop Tutu would not only serve to highlight the struggle of black South Africans but motivate the global community, in particular, America, to take part in fighting the injustices of apartheid:

Desmund Tutu represents the last chance for nonviolence in South Africa.

In one of his many moments of grace, black activist W.E.B. DuBoise said that ‘the stars of black men flash across the sky only to die before the world has rightly gauged their brightness.’

Last week, the world finally gauged the brightness of Desmond Tutu’s star. The challenge to our government is whether it will aid or continue to thwart the star that Tutu symbolizes, the inexorable course of history that is on the side of South Africa’s oppressed majority.²⁹⁵

In a column closer to home, Gilliam spotlighted her older sister, Evelyn’s upcoming nuptials. In this congratulatory column Gilliam recounted her sister’s patient anticipation of love. She also applauded Evelyn’s consistent contributions to their family:

She was always ready for responsibility. As the (much, much) older sister (honest, folks), she was the mother figure when our parents were away. When our father died, while those of us on the latter end of the family were quite young, she went to work and helped to earn the living for us kids.

Years later, when the inevitable time came in our family that we no longer felt secure to have our mother living at home with just our sister, Jaunita, who is mentally retarded, Evelyn was the one to give up her apartment in Chicago and return to Louisville.

And so here’s looking at you, Sis. Here’s to you--and Clyde.²⁹⁶

Even though, Gilliam frequently wrote about public figures, her portraits of less well know individuals were also designed to motivate her readers. In these stories of human resilience and kindness, Gilliam hoped to motivate her audience. In another example, Gilliam

²⁹⁵ Dorothy Gilliam, “Bishop Tutu’s Message,” *The Washington Post*, B3, October 22, 1984.

²⁹⁶ Dorothy Gilliam, “Stigmas,” *The Washington Post*, D1, December 5, 1983.

wrote about Joyce Taylor, a long-time foster care mother who raised two of her own children and then also took responsibility for raising two sisters, ages 3 and 6. Gilliam wrote: “It is said that when one person helps another, the good is often returned from another, often unexpected source. But people like Taylor also participate in a larger cycle, for in helping one person, an entire community is enriched.”²⁹⁷

Gilliam Educates about Education

Gilliam also used her voice to address the perpetual problems plaguing public school education. It must have been frustrating for her that the articles she wrote in 1975 were about the same problems she addressed in her column almost 20 years later (1997). Gilliam often linked educational opportunities, or the lack thereof, to issues of poverty and race. Much like her sister journalist, Francis Murphy, Gilliam honed in on the inherent injustices of the American educational system.

In “Public Education in the 80s: A Sense of Deepening Crisis,” Gilliam discussed what she saw as some of the most prevalent problems and possible solutions of American schools:

It is sadly ironic, then, that public education is in peril as we begin the 1980s. Society seems to be willing to make a casualty of public education.

I feel one of the keys to public education is more money. But much of the problem of disciplining students lies in our failure to motivate them and this is often because teachers are not well prepared. I would like to see tougher standards imposed on teacher preparedness as well as substantially reduced class sizes.

I think it is also inevitable that Washington needs some system of tracking, since not every student is able to learn at the same speed. Black students have been abused by rigid tracking in the past, but even the arch-critic of tracking, the late Julius Hobson, opposed not the principle but the distorted application of the system.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Dorothy Gilliam, “An Act of Caring,” *The Washington Post*, D3, September 29, 1986.

²⁹⁸ Dorothy Gilliam, “Public Education in the ‘80s: A Sense of Deepening Crisis,” *The Washington Post*, C1, January 7, 1980.

Gilliam also held teachers responsible and partially blamed the two decades of downward spiral in education on teachers. In support of then Secretary of Education Terrell H. Bell, Gilliam argued that the overall drop in academic performance corresponded with the decline in the quality of teachers. The remedy, according to Bell and Gilliam was the reinstatement of teacher competency testing. Although Gilliam argued the pros and cons of testing, she ultimately decided that a new and better test should be administered because: “We should make every effort to give teachers the prestige and the money they deserve. But we should also get something in return: Like a good education for our children.”²⁹⁹

More government appropriated money, teacher preparation, and improved student tracking were just the beginning of Gilliam’s report card on public education. She also called on parents to “hold teachers accountable but also [they] must involve themselves in their child’s education.”³⁰⁰ As an example of taking her own advice, Gilliam wrote about how she participated in her children’s education. She described helping her daughter prepare for selecting a college. This column was unusual because her daughters had requested that she not discuss them in her column.³⁰¹ But, Gilliam must have found this topic worth a brief breach of their agreement. As a black woman who had attended four different colleges, Gilliam knew the importance of choosing the right one.

In the column, she described encouraging her daughter to take courses to help her do well on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and college interviews. Gilliam wrote that she started conversations and reviewed brochures from various institutions beginning when her

²⁹⁹ Dorothy Gilliam, “Teachers,” *The Washington Post*, D1, November 30, 1981.

³⁰⁰ Dorothy Gilliam, “Parents and Schools: Partners in Education,” *The Washington Post*, B1, August 23, 1980.

³⁰¹ Interview with Dorothy Gilliam, Fatimah Salleh (April 2011).

daughter was in tenth grade. Gilliam discussed the importance of the college decision: “The choice of a college is difficult--and probably more important than most students understand. Long after our daughter has walked onto a campus, figured out names of the various residence halls, and worried about her grades, the choice will affect her life, her future, her friendships.”³⁰²

After calling on the government, teachers, and parents to help improve education, Gilliam still wanted more. She petitioned help from the whole community in a 1984 column “Explorations.” Gilliam boldly asked the community to hold higher expectations for black and Hispanic children:

Increasing the wider society’s expectations of poor, black, and Hispanic kids is only a step, but an important one. It is almost a truism that Americans with money and means are expected to do better. From that starting point, we can begin to appreciate how deeply runs the conditioning in many poor, black or Hispanic students can’t do well.

Despite the overwhelming odds, minorities display amazing capabilities to do well when they are expected to achieve.

I am looking for a commitment with optimism.³⁰³

Issues of race often crept into Gilliam’s commentaries on education. In an especially telling column, Gilliam told the story of a single, black mother’s sacrifices to send her daughter to a predominantly white private school. Gilliam quoted the mother expressing concern that her child may be so entrenched in her white school environment that she will lose her connection with her own black culture: “ ‘You know the classic stereotype of the black person who is raised so much around whites and is part of neither the white nor the

³⁰² Dorothy Gilliam, “Selecting a College: A Complex Adventure,” *The Washington Post*, B1, September 1, 1980.

³⁰³ Dorothy Gilliam, “Expectations,” *The Washington Post*, B1, June 7, 1984.

black world and is an object of ridicule—I don't want that for her,' she says.”³⁰⁴ Gilliam's answer: Hire more black teachers in predominantly white schools: “Black teachers would give dimension to white students and teachers as well. At too many schools, the most conspicuous black staff is the service staff.”³⁰⁵

Gilliam's Discussion of Race in a “White” Space

While rarely the primary focus, race was infused into the subtext of the majority of Gilliam's writings. Gilliam typically addressed race inside another overarching theme, such as education, poverty, or politics. When Gilliam did overtly address race, she did so with candor and rigor. One thing that made Gilliam's voice so audacious was that she sometimes aired “the dirty laundry” of the black community in a predominantly white forum. For instance, in December 1979, Gilliam wrote of a meeting of black men and women discussing their gender roles. Gilliam described the gathering, “at times an uncomfortable meeting. At times the voices of the women became raspy with pain and anger and perspiration beaded on the men's foreheads like fresh chicken pox.”³⁰⁶ Gilliam explained the deep discomfort:

...by the 1970s when black women found themselves lagging behind white men and women and black men on the economic ladder they had to face what they had refused to a decade before: black male chauvinism was alive and well.

Still, it has been hard for black men and women to talk out their differences. For one thing, they have been stung by white-created myths about what ‘studs’ black men were and what domineering matriarchs the women were. Because they could not control the myths, many chose just not to talk at all.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Dorothy Gilliam, “‘The Dream is Attained’—and Found Imperfect,” *The Washington Post*, C1, January 21, 1980.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Dorothy Gilliam, “Black People Grappling With Changing Roles,” *The Washington Post*, C1, December 3, 1979.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

Her approach in this column can be considered intra-group communication but columns like this one do not wholly reflect any one ethnic media function. These writings are more of an advice column combined with a teaching and educating moment. For example, after discussing the societal and historical factors attributed to the apparent disconnect in black male, female relationships (educational), Gilliam advised black men and women to keep talking (advice column).

Gilliam continued advocating for healthy dialogue in the column, “Black Parents Flustered Talking to Teens About Sex.” Gilliam wrote that after a conversation with her sister, she realized that she, too, was a victim of sexual silence. She recognized that she had not talked enough about sex with her daughters and her hesitance stemmed from her own upbringing. Gilliam wrote that her talk with her sister was a:

...jolting reminder of the puritanical upbringing black girls received a generation ago. It was a result of the general repressiveness of the era. But many black mothers also transmitted the puritanical attitudes, out to battle stereotypes that ‘all black girls are loose.’ But things haven’t changed much since then. Despite more liberal attitudes about sex, most parents are as tongue-tied as ever about it. And that’s particularly ironic for black parents since black women are the most likely teens to get pregnant.³⁰⁸

In recognizing that sexual censorship had debilitated the black community, Gilliam suggested that parents start talking more “fully and frankly” to their children. She acknowledged the hesitancy of black parents to recommend birth control because: “black parents still view it as an attempt by whites to limit their numbers.”³⁰⁹ But, she wrote that these views have to be dealt with to protect the children. Gilliam wrote that after talking with her daughter about healthy sex practices she still “prays a bit.”

³⁰⁸ Dorothy Gilliam, “Black Parents Flustered Talking to Teens of Sex,” *The Washington Post*, C1, November 26, 1979.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

Gilliam asked black men and women to hold an open dialogue about gender relations, she asked black parents to talk to their teens about healthy sexual behavior, and in 1981, she asked the black middle class to help out those less fortunate. In “Self-Help,” Gilliam wrote about a conversation she had with a friend where they argued that the black middle class must help poorer blacks:

She was very angry.

“I’m blaming us (middle class blacks) for failing to transmit to the poor the same psychological attitude that our parents, teacher, ministers transmitted to us—the message that, in spite of discrimination, we can accomplish things and we are responsible for our actions,” she said.

In these hard times of shrinking opportunity and shrinking commitment to justice, black self-help can be mobilized in constructive and meaningful ways. If middle class blacks refuse this opportunity, they may end up as just empty window dressing—alone, caught between a society whose record of concern for blacks is at best open to question and a bedrock of poor black who scorn them as turncoats. The message—pride, if you will—means not only pride in who we are but pride in what we do.

It is a message we should have never forgotten.³¹⁰

Gilliam is bold in her ongoing conversation with her fellow black citizens in addressing the hard issues forcing her community to reevaluate and respond to cultural pitfalls and follies. And while she did not exonerate white society, Gilliam held her own community accountable and responsible.

Gilliam also offered feature stories illuminating the struggles of black life. These could be seen as a form of extra-group communication as they served to both educate readers and sway non-supporters to understand the plight of the black American. A prime example is Gilliam’s article addressing how she and many black Americans felt invisible in the 1984

³¹⁰ Dorothy Gilliam, “Self-Help,” *The Washington Post*, D1, November 16, 1981.

political debates. Here she speaks on behalf of black Americans in a disappointed and ominous tone:

It wasn't that I didn't care about such issues as balancing the national budget, taxes and social security. After all, I am American. What was missing was any recognition of my existence as a black American.

I understand that some people will feel that I'm making too much of a distance between American and black Americans. But we're not yet at that point when 'American,' and 'black' are synonymous. This is no wish to further fragment America, but a bow to the reality of growing unease I'm sensing among blacks, the low hum of rage.³¹¹

As she continued her mounting critique of the racist practices embedded in American culture, Gilliam took on the airlines. In 1986, Gilliam pointed out that fewer than 1% of commercial airline pilots were African-American. She railed against the airlines and the institutional racism hindering the hiring of black pilots. Gilliam recounted the long historical battle of the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II and their fight for flight:

Make no mistake about it, the low number of black pilots and professionals is a sad state of affairs. Not only does the government need to step up its efforts to enhance the number of pilots and other managers, but the airlines need to do a much better job as well. Now is an opportune time to help, rather than hinder, these dreams of flying that have been too long deferred.³¹²

These examples illustrate how Gilliam taught about racism. First, she described a specific racial injustice and then she showed how that injustice was operative in society.

Gilliam's Focus on Females

Gilliam also spoke often of the female plight. In her December 5, 1983 column, Gilliam wrote about the stigma of unplanned pregnancies among the unwed. Gilliam wrote about a pregnant, 21-year-old coed: "...this young woman's story is also one of a family's

³¹¹ Dorothy Gilliam, "The Invisible American," *The Washington Post*, C3, October 11, 1984.

³¹² Dorothy Gilliam, "An Unfulfilled Dream," *The Washington Post*, C3, October 2, 1986.

pain and sensitization, a young woman's coming of age and changing her traditional scornful outlook toward unwed mothers to a broader more tolerant view..."³¹³ On the flip side, Gilliam also featured an unnamed teenager and her family's travails through an abortion with unforeseen physical and emotional consequences. Gilliam concluded this heart-wrenching story: "[D]espite the emotional turmoil this abortion engendered, I feel it was a necessary one that underlines how important it is for people to have freedom to choose."³¹⁴

Gilliam also was concerned about society's pressure on young girls to grow up too fast. In a 1985 column, Gilliam expressed her disgust over Lord and Taylor's ad offering beauty workshops to adolescents: "Making 11-year-olds feel that they need the polished fashion look of an adult strikes me as just another erosion of childhood, another indication of the wisdom of that handful of psychologists and writers who are crying in the wilderness that we are hurrying young people along too fast and depriving our children of their chance to really grow up."³¹⁵

From unplanned pregnancies to abortion and society's push to rush womanhood, Gilliam wrote about the many challenges of female life. Then, in true Gilliam style, she planted race in the equation. In "Someone to Love," Gilliam discussed the shortage of eligible black men. At first glance, the column is void of any racial undertones and just focuses on the struggles of single women in Washington D.C. to find a suitable partner. "It's not because these women are unattractive, or uneducated; it's not because they are frigid or

³¹³ Dorothy Gilliam, "Stigmas," *The Washington Post*, D1, December 5, 1983.

³¹⁴ Dorothy Gilliam, "Nightmare of Abortion: One Family's Trauma," *The Washington Post*, C1, August 25, 1980.

³¹⁵ Dorothy Gilliam, "Hurry, hurry," *The Washington Post*, B1, September 5, 1983.

afraid of passion; it's not even because they are looking for Prince Charming that they don't have a man. They simply can't find any.”³¹⁶

Although Gilliam recognized that both black and white women faced difficulties in the pursuit of love, she asserted that black women and even black men face additional obstacles. The shortage of gathering and/or meeting places (restaurants, country clubs, singles clubs) open to black Americans was one such obstacle. According to Gilliam, the nation's capital excluded blacks from its social scene, making it exponentially harder for single blacks to meet other singles. But, Gilliam had a solution. She encouraged black D.C.ers to “develop restaurants and coffee houses in which to spend their leisure time...and finally, both men and women need to retain a belief that it is always possible to find someone to love.”³¹⁷

This column is a good example of how Gilliam quickly flows between extra-group and intra-group communication. At the beginning of the column, Gilliam's message was directed to all her readers and then midway she switched to communication with black singles, a form of intra-group communication. Her intra-group communication offered advice and hope, while the extra-group communication was primarily education and critique.

In evidence of an even more focused form of intra-group communication, Gilliam wrote columns solely dedicated to black women. A number of Gilliam's columns directly dealt with the difficulties black women faced in dealing with black men. In one column, Gilliam attacked Fred Williamson, a former football star turned actor, for his remarks on why he doesn't date black women. Williamson had stated on a nationally televised show that the

³¹⁶ Dorothy Gilliam, “Someone to Love,” *The Washington Post*, C3, January 24, 1985.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

main reason successful black men do not date black women was because of black men's elevated social and economic status. Gilliam wrote a harsh rebuttal:

One's choice of a mate is a very individual one, and just as certainly as there is no guarantee that skin color in and of itself makes for compatibility, each individual has the right to his choice of mate. But in expressing his personal preferences, Williamson managed to level an insult on all black women.

Remarks such as those are absurd in their implication that there are no poor women of other races and not rich, cultured women who are black. One hears in Williamson's answer that a man like him 'moves up' and moves beyond the black women; really, this says more about his limitations than anything else. Such attitudes may be behind the increasing number of black women who are broadening their sights beyond black men. Moreover, the narrowness of Williamson's remarks is an affront to black men as well, sending the message that the attitudes carried with him to his own success are ones they should hold as well.

Still, the deeper problem is that too many black women are trapped by this myth.³¹⁸

In her continued effort to present insights about black womanhood, Gilliam reviewed and discussed books written by and for black women. In a 1997 column, she reviewed Jill Nelson's book, "Straight No Chaser: How I Became a Grown-Up Black Woman." Gilliam was forthright in her assessment of the book, praising Nelson's insights and critiquing what she found lacking. While Gilliam said she found herself saying out loud, "yeah, girl, yeah," throughout the book, she wanted more from Nelson: "Although I would have liked to have seen more solutions than Nelson offered, I recognize that she set out to 'begin a dialogue,' not solve all problems."³¹⁹

Gilliam's expectations for Jill Nelson's book could be considered an expectation Gilliam had for her own column. In her column, Gilliam began a dialogue about race, gender, and education and she also offered hope, advice, and ways to mobilize. Gilliam successfully

³¹⁸ Dorothy Gilliam, "Attitudes," *The Washington Post*, B1, December 11, 1982.

³¹⁹ Dorothy Gilliam, "A Woman Who Won't Be Silent," *The Washington Post*, H1, September 27, 1997.

spoke to two communities: the white mainstream and the marginalized black community. What set Gilliam apart from the other journalists in this project is not only her work for a mainstream media outlet but her willingness to direct her writings to black women, a smaller section of the black community. Neither Murphy nor Bluford routinely addressed black women's issues. Oddly enough, Gilliam had the largest forum for reaching the white public (extra-group communication) yet, at times, addressed a smaller group of people, black women (intra, intra-group communication.) Her voice resounded with care and concern for both her community at large and the smaller segments of the communities to which she also belonged.

Francis Murphy's Voice in *The Afro*

From 1951 to 1954, Francis Murphy worked as the editor-in-chief of the D.C. branch of the *Afro*. Murphy's editorials during this time provide insight into her concerns, passions and platforms. She skillfully wielded her words to explore and expose varied subjects; a few subjects warranted her constant and fervent attention.

Murphy vs. Segregation

Before becoming the editor of the D.C. *Afro*, Murphy had been a schoolteacher and had received her Masters in Education from John Hopkins University. Her passion for education is reflected in Murphy's four years of editorials for the *Afro*. Murphy's frequent coverage of both local and national educational issues proves her invaluable understanding of the social and political climate surrounding school segregation. Her editorials also provide a

rare glimpse into the conditions of black segregated schools prior to integration because statistical information regarding school spending in this period is scarce.³²⁰

In the years, months and days leading up to the federal case that would legally end school segregation, Murphy used her editorials to proclaim, persuade, and propel the merits of integration. She was also not opposed to the occasional harangue against what she called “do-nothing” school boards and racist proponents of segregation.

Murphy’s voice, through her column, was her greatest weapon. With her weapon loaded, Murphy attacked segregation and in so doing served two of the major functions of ethnic media – as sentinel/watchdog and as a source of information. As early as 1951, Murphy wrote of two successful integration initiatives in elementary schools, one in Arizona and one in North Carolina. With such promising reports on integration, Murphy wanted to know why Washington D.C. still held to their segregated school policies: “All this gives rise to the question as to what characteristics of barbarism are believed to afflict Washingtonians that would make it impossible for them to teach and attend schools together.”³²¹

To prompt Washington D.C. to integrate schools, Murphy addressed the dangers of over capacity facing colored (sic) D.C. schools:

As a result of ... growing population, colored schools are in the worst plight they have ever been in and are getting progressively worse.
Teachers are carrying staggering loads, and with Congress threatening to cut off temporary instructors, the loads are getting heavier and heavier.

³²⁰ A report produced by the National Bureau of Economic Research posited that: “the Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas decision greatly curtailed the states’ dissemination of data on school quality based on race. Although evidence that we present below suggests that school integration did not begin on a wide scale until after 1964, the Brown ruling, which declared segregation in schools unconstitutional, provided states with a powerful incentive to suppress information that might hasten legal action against them.” Michael A. Boozer, Alan B. Krueger, and Shari Wolkon, “Race and School Quality since Brown vs. Board of Education,” *NBER Working Paper Series* 4109 (1992):1-5.

³²¹ Editorial, *The Afro*, October 20, 1951.

Buildings are crowded to the extent that either new structures must be provided for the education of colored youths or old ones transferred from white to colored occupancy.³²²

Two months later Murphy used two local Washington schools, Payne and Madison, as examples of how the school board's overt efforts to preserve segregation created dangerous traveling conditions for the students being bussed to the segregated schools:

Making the slightly larger Madison School available to colored pupils provides a very limited degree of relief. Even that relief is likely to be overshadowed by the mutual inconvenience imposed on both the Payne pupils and the white children now attending Madison, in having to make longer and more hazardous trips to and from their new school locations.³²³

Murphy asserted that despite the harrowing conditions in colored schools: the overcrowding,³²⁴ staggering teacher workload, and the deplorable physical condition of the school buildings, "the School board and most of the district are dead set on maintaining segregated schools at any cost." Murphy argued that it was the black students who felt the cost. In detailing the reality of segregation, Murphy showed that there was no equality in the separation of black and white students.

Murphy illuminated another evil bi-product of school segregation--the racism it transmitted into the minds of students. In an August 1952 editorial, Murphy was appalled at a white district school students' refusal to play against another school because of the "possibility that a colored player" might be on the opposing team. Murphy blamed the school board for the attitude of the white football team.

In view of such a situation it seems only reasonable to ask whether the schools are producing useful citizens ready to take their place in a free society, or narrow minded men and women who will only serve the interest of intolerance. As long as the school board clings to the ideas of outmoded segregation, it will impress the youth of

³²² Editorial, *The Afro*, May 10, 1952.

³²³ Editorial, *The Afro*, December 8, 1951.

³²⁴ Murphy cites one school that exceeds its student capacity by 2,104.

Washington that segregation is right and that a democratic society can never be achieved in Washington.³²⁵

Relentless in her campaign against segregation, Murphy called for the resignations of members of the school board who refused to see the damages of segregation. “If ordinary common sense and genuine concern for the education of youth are so lacking as they seem to be in some members of the board, let them at least recall their oath of office...”³²⁶

On the bright side, Murphy spotlighted a group of white students at Kenliworth School who bucked the rules of segregation by inviting a black student on their school grounds. The students asked Roberta Pickney, a young black girl, to their school to present her with an award. The \$25 bond, raised by the students, was presented to Pickney on behalf of her recently deceased father, Leonard Pickney, the Kenliworth school janitor.

Leading psychologists and biologists have expressed the opinion numerous times that prejudices are not hereditary. Until they are subjected to them, the minds of young children are free of the so-called mores and segregation ideas practiced by some adults.

We firmly believe that if the authorities would integrate District schools and adults leave the children to themselves they will work together harmoniously. It has proved satisfactory elsewhere and will do so in Washington if given a chance.³²⁷

In her campaign to end school segregation, Murphy focused on local school issues in an effort to highlight the national epidemic of education disparities. She showed no qualms in holding the school board responsible for the evil fruits of segregation. Murphy made sure to laud cases that showed the merits of integration.

Although school integration was the major subject of her editorials centered on education, she also discussed other educational topics ranging from advice to college

³²⁵ Editorial, *The Afro*, August 16, 1952.

³²⁶ Editorial, *The Afro*, October 24, 1953.

³²⁷ Editorial, *The Afro*, March 15, 1952.

students,³²⁸ tips for high school seniors,³²⁹ and the need for parent involvement. About one in four of more than 200 of Murphy's editorials had to do with education, by far the most on any one topic.

Murphy's Campaign to End Police Brutality

Murphy also wrote often about the D.C. police force. Once again, Murphy's coverage of police brutality in the Washington D.C. area provides rare historical context to the pervasive injustices and violence leading up to and surrounding the Civil Rights Movement.³³⁰ In one of her first editorials dedicated to this issue in August 1951, Murphy detailed her plan to remedy the rash of police brutality plaguing the black community: "Police brutality, like influenza, boils, weevils, or athlete's foot, will get out of hand whenever counter measures are relaxed."³³¹ Of the despicable acts she wrote: "It will take more than a few voices, however, to bring this about. Emphatic and repeated demands from civic associations, fraternal groups, and other organizations will be needed to awaken Major Barrett to his responsibility for civilizing his Metropolitan Police Force."³³² In another editorial she encouraged readers to protest: "By letter, and every other means of respectful and dignified protest, we must make our position clear to the city officials who are responsible for the conduct of the Metropolitan police department."³³³

³²⁸ Editorial, *The Afro*, August 2, 1952.

³²⁹ Editorial. *The Afro*, May 9, 1953.

³³⁰ Much historical attention is given to the police brutality cases resulting in uprisings and riots. For example, the Black Panthers, a group of black radicals, called for an end of police brutality in Watts, California. Murphy's column allows us to know that this problem was not localized in California but possibly an epidemic raging thousands of miles away in the nation's capital as well.

³³¹ Editorial, *The Afro*, August 11, 1951.

³³² Editorial, *The Afro*, August 11, 1951.

³³³ Editorial, *The Afro*, August 29, 1953.

As an example of the collective expression function of ethnic media, Murphy propelled public protest through her editorials. In numerous editorials she lambasted the local police officials. She did not shy away from naming high-ranking police officials and exposing perfidious practices. Upon the retirement of police Superintendent Major Robert J. Barrett in 1951, Murphy scrutinized the officer's four-year tenure as head of the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department. In the editorial, "No Tears Over Barrett," she offered counsel and warning to Barrett's successor, Robert V. Murray:

We hope the new superintendent is sufficiently alert to avoid the mistakes that robbed his predecessor of an honorable withdrawal. With his rise to the top marred by well-supported charges of brutality, manipulation of police records, and dependence on political backing to keep him in the clear, Barrett let his entire four years as superintendent go by without any visible effort to atone for his past transgression.³³⁴

Three weeks later, Murphy wrote of her disappointment with new Superintendent Murray. In a case involving a police officer accused of using a razor to assault a black suspect, the police board charged the officer only with "conduct unbecoming an officer" and fined him \$75.

Murphy was outraged:

This whole affairs smells very much like the traditional white washing of police brutality charges that characterized the recently terminated regime of Robert J. Barrett as police chief.

Maybe Chief Murray hasn't had a chance to tell his trial board members that he will expect policemen to act like officers of the law, rather than like the hoodlums hiding behind badges, clubs, and pistols.³³⁵

Black or white, Murphy had no tolerance for officers guilty of using excessive force. In a 1952 case in which two black officers were under investigation for beating members of a

³³⁴ Editorial, *The Afro*, November 26, 1951.

³³⁵ Editorial, *The Afro*, December 8, 1951.

family, Murphy, speaking on behalf of her paper and her community, weighed in about the pending charges.

We abhor brutality in any form. We shudder to think that members of our own race join in wielding night sticks, gun butts, or other weapons against us. It is definitely more than we can take.

We know that the police must take necessary precautions to protect themselves against unruly persons whom they are compelled to arrest.

We certainly hope that Private Espeut and Gray are not guilty of the dastardly acts for which they have been accused. If they are, we say that they and their fellow officers, should be dealt with to the limit of the law, and kicked off our police force.³³⁶

Special in this column is Murphy's use of first person plural. Her other editorials were generally written from the third person. In using a first person point of view, Murphy emphasizes her role as one speaking for the community in addressing those outside the community. In another example, Murphy used the first person plural point of view when coming to the defense of Lieutenant Daniel Pittman, a black officer accused of accepting bribes. Only on this occasion, she defined "we" as "the Afro, along with members of religious, civic, fraternal and social organizations, as well as individuals in high places."³³⁷

Once again as the representative voice of her community she wrote:

We have not doubted his (Lt. Pittman's) integrity. Until it is proved that he is guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer we will continue to have that opinion.

We do believe, however, that these incriminating implications should not be allowed to remain on the records without giving Lieutenant Pittman a chance to defend himself.

We feel that Lieutenant Pittman owes an explanation to all the individuals who have put their trust in him and backed him through the years in his battles against bigotry and injustice.³³⁸

³³⁶ Editorial, *The Afro*, March 15, 1952.

³³⁷ Editorial, *The Afro*, January 26, 1952.

³³⁸ Editorial, *The Afro*, January 26, 1952.

Whether speaking on behalf of her community or directly to her community, Murphy was clear about her disdain for injustice especially among those who were supposed to be upholding the law. For Murphy it did not matter if the person was the head of the police department, a decorated lieutenant, or a fledgling private, she held him to a high standard of human decency and decorum. In the same vein, she would offer her support and reserve final judgment. Murphy held black officers to a two-part standard-- they had to answer not only to the police department but also to their community.

Murphy's Health Campaign

Murphy's editorials frequently served an intra-group informational function when she discussed health issues. On several occasions, including New Years 1954, Murphy doled out strong warnings against drunk driving, cautioning drinkers "to stay away from steering wheels entirely."³³⁹ A few months before this editorial, Murphy relayed the sobering details surrounding a 23-year-old's drunk driving fatality. Her lead was simply, "Sgt. Robert J. Taylor is dead."³⁴⁰ After describing the gruesome nature of his death, her closing words were: "Alcohol and gasoline do not mix. Something all drivers should know."³⁴¹

Near Christmas 1953, Murphy told her readers to invest in safety plugs for their tree lights and to refrain from letting lights burn any more than three hours at a time.³⁴² Two months earlier she had asked readers to check for fire hazards: "Do your part. Make it a habit to inspect your home or place of business periodically—starting now."³⁴³ The previous year,

³³⁹ Editorial, *The Afro*, January 2, 1954.

³⁴⁰ Editorial, *The Afro*, August 22, 1953.

³⁴¹ Editorial, *The Afro*, August 22, 1953

³⁴² Editorial, *The Afro*, December 19, 1953.

³⁴³ Editorial, *The Afro*, October 3, 1953.

just days before the 4th of July, Murphy reminded parents of the dangers of firecrackers and the 16 children in the area who were burned from fireworks the previous year. Murphy asked parents not to spend their hard-earned money on potentially dangerous pyrotechnics.³⁴⁴

In addition to campaigns about drunk driving and fire safety, Murphy alerted her community to the outbreak of ringworm in the schools;³⁴⁵ the warning signs of glaucoma³⁴⁶ and tuberculosis;³⁴⁷ and polio prevention.³⁴⁸

Often Murphy's health editorials had a two-fold mission: (1) to educate her readers, and (2) to mobilize her audience to take part in charities, fundraisers, and drives. These two parts of Murphy's editorials make it hard to categorize them into one or even two ethnic media functions. These editorials may best be described as a blend of a public service announcement with a call for collective community action. Her editorials on tuberculosis and polio are perfect examples of how she wove education together with mobilization. To educate her community about tuberculosis she wrote:

An hour from the time you begin reading this, four persons will have died from tuberculosis. In 1950, 33,557 Americans fell victim to the dread white plague.

As alarming as that figure may seem, it is a monumental improvement over the TB death rate of 25 years ago. Today it ranks seventh, but, no respecter of race, creed or situation in life, the dread disease is still the greatest killer during the most productive years of our lives. Its greatest number of victims is persons between the ages of 15 and 34.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁴ Editorial, *The Afro*, June 14, 1952.

³⁴⁵ Editorial, *The Afro*, March 6, 1954.

³⁴⁶ Editorial, *The Afro*, February 16, 1952.

³⁴⁷ Editorial, *The Afro*, November 24, 1951.

³⁴⁸ Editorial, *The Afro*, January 16, 1954.

³⁴⁹ Editorial, *The Afro*, November 24, 1951.

In the next paragraphs, Murphy detailed the modern medicines miracles of streptomycin, aureomycin, papra-aminosalicylic acid in treating the effects of tuberculosis.

The editorial on polio shared a similar stylistic approach. Murphy discussed how polio results in infantile paralysis. She then described a new serum, gama globulin, which helped prevent the spread of the disease. At the end of these types of editorials, Murphy routinely made a final persuasive push. She typically asked her readers to: (1) seek help and/or take precautions, and (2) “give and give generously.”³⁵⁰ The last paragraphs of Murphy’s editorial on tuberculosis exemplify her two-part approach at mobilizing her readers:

The annual Christmas Seal sale-now in its 45th year-has become a symbol of man’s fight against tuberculosis.

Like the fight for freedom, it is everybody’s fight.
Protect yourself. Buy your Christmas seals today.³⁵¹

Murphy’s health editorials packed a powerful punch. It is notable that Murphy did not shy away from using medical lexicon. These editorials were designed to raise awareness, motivate, and raise money in fewer than 300 words and several inches of type.

Murphy’s Voice Raised for Funds

Murphy was also concerned about events pertaining to the upkeep and appearance of the community. Murphy covered the *Afro*’s Clean Block Campaign and their efforts to install petunia-filled window boxes around the community.³⁵² A 1952 May editorial encouraged citizens to take care of their cemeteries:

With the coming of Memorial Day this week, we can think of no better time to dedicate ourselves to cleaning up these forlorn graves and showing our loved one some semblance of the respect we tried to make them believe we had for them while

³⁵⁰ Editorial, *The Afro*, January 16, 1954.

³⁵¹ Editorial, *The Afro*, November 24, 1951.

³⁵² Editorial, *The Afro*, September 8, 1952.

they lived and the esteem in which we endeavored to show the public we held them at the time of their deaths.³⁵³

Murphy supported neighborhood beautification projects with the same fervor she condemned acts of vandalism. A rash of vandalism in the public schools and the subsequent \$60,000 spent to replace broken windows drew Murphy's ire:

During these times when we are crying for additional school buildings, more teachers, and better facilities are certainly behooves us to take care of what we have. To some \$60,000 might appear to be a drop in a bucket when compared with what we need. Whatever the sum is that we spend, for unnecessary items that could well be used elsewhere, it makes our task of securing the vital items to keep up the standards of our schools and our community as a whole much greater.³⁵⁴

Most of Murphy's editorials on communal involvement had to do with local and national drives for what she considered important causes. Over her four years of editorials, Murphy asked readers to: help raise \$16 million for cancer research, contribute to veterans in need of orthopedic braces and prosthetics, and volunteer time and money to local community centers. These editorials were organized similarly. First, Murphy explained the organization and what it did, then she let readers know how they could help. Murphy highlighted the organization and/or group's contribution(s) to the community as the first part of her plea. Then she described the circumstances in which the community could offer aid.

An editorial on the Urban League typifies Murphy's template for soliciting support. First, the description of the organization: "What does the Urban League do? Its main sphere of operations is that of research, opening job opportunities and community organization."³⁵⁵ Then, the need: "Increased membership is necessary if the League is to do the type of job of which it is capable. It is a Community Chest agency here but the support it has been getting

³⁵³ Editorial, *The Afro*, May 31, 1952.

³⁵⁴ Editorial, *The Afro*, June 14, 1952.

³⁵⁵ Editorial, *The Afro*, February 16, 1952.

from the chest for the past few years has not been adequate to do an appreciable amount of work.”³⁵⁶

But Murphy’s support was not without scrutiny. In one editorial Murphy expressed reservations over the Catholic Church’s drive aimed to raise money for “colored and Indian missions.”

Special drives for colored and Indian churches just give us the impression that instead of trying to get rid of separate churches, school and its other possessions there are those who would perpetuate it.
We believe the Catholic Church should consider these points in its future plans.³⁵⁷

Murphy’s editorials also reflected her backing of good causes. Murphy’s goal in these cause-driven editorials was usually participation rather than giving money. Special to these editorials are Murphy’s detailed descriptions of exactly how the community should and could support a cause. In a 1952 editorial on Child Health Day, for example, Murphy described how clergymen, public officials, parents, teachers and policemen/firemen could commemorate the day.³⁵⁸ For Brotherhood Week, February 17-24, 1952, Murphy proposed open dialogue at the United Nations and in local communities. She wrote of “settling rambling discontent and the setting aside of personal bickering and political allegiances.”³⁵⁹

While Murphy’s health editorials straddle and possibly create new ethnic media functions, most of Murphy’s writings promoting community activism are archetypical examples of the information function. These editorials frequently alerted readers of upcoming community drives, social and political events, and protests/rallies.

³⁵⁶ Editorial, *The Afro*, February 16, 1952.

³⁵⁷ Editorial, *The Afro*, February 2, 1952.

³⁵⁸ Editorial, *The Afro*, April 26, 1952.

³⁵⁹ Editorial, *The Afro*, February 16, 1952.

Overall, Murphy's editorials were direct and her voice clear. She had a deep-rooted connection to her community and was inspired by her passion to improve the lives of her neighbors. She shouted out the injustices of segregation and police brutality. She sang the praises of social and community causes. Her voice unceasingly spoke of health, education and any issue she felt threatened and/or strengthened her community. She spoke on behalf of her community and to her community.

Chapter 6:
Echoes of the Past Heard in the Present

"I think the importance of doing activist work is precisely because it allows you to give back and consider yourself not as a single individual who may have achieved whatever but to be an ongoing part of an ongoing historical movement."

--Angela Davis³⁶⁰

This research aimed to add the names of three black women journalists, Lucile Bluford, Francis Murphy, and Dorothy Gilliam to the annals of journalism history. Because black women journalists are scarcely mentioned and researched in the history of journalism, this project was designed to examine the work and lives of these women and to see how their personal empowerment translated into resistance. As journalists during the Civil Rights Movement, a particularly tumultuous and critical time, these journalists' writings helped draw attention to the issues plaguing their communities.

While the life stories of these women are unique, they do bear strong similarities with one another. In synthesizing Bluford's, Murphy's, and Gilliam's oral history interviews and written work several consistent themes surfaced. All three women fought throughout their lives for racial parity. Their methods and styles of illuminating and attacking racial injustice differed but all were devoted to improving the lives of black people in America. They used their talents as journalists and educators to speak to other

³⁶⁰ PBS, "the two nations of black America: Interview with Angela Davis," www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/race/davis.html (accessed April 10, 2012).

black Americans as well as to white America about the injustices caused by racial discrimination in the last half of the 20th Century.

Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam also each benefitted from the advice and support of male mentors, especially their fathers and editors of black newspapers who recognized their talents and were willing to support the advancement of women. Each of these three black women journalists also acknowledged their predecessors, those whose successful struggles had paved their way. Murphy and Gilliam were also appreciative of the extent to which black schooling aided in their personal development.

Black Male Mentors

One consistent theme from the oral history account of the three black women journalists is the importance of black male mentors. Black Feminist Theory touches on the connection between black men and black women but rarely mentions the helpful role black men play for black women, especially in the world of journalism. Historian Rodger Streitmatter also noticed the importance of black male mentors in his study of black women journalists. As Streitmatter noted: “Ironically, one factor that helped black women succeed in journalism directly involves the most significant obstacle hindering white women working in the same field: men. The male journalists who worked with the women described in this book were largely supportive of the women’s efforts.”³⁶¹ Black male mentors were similarly important in the lives of the three women journalists included here.

³⁶¹ Streitmatter, *Raising her Voice*, 148.

Lucile Bluford credited Chester A. Franklin for her start and more than 30-year career in journalism. Known for his tutelage of fledgling journalists, Franklin, editor of the *Call*, gave Bluford her first job in journalism and her last—upon his death he bequeathed a portion of the paper and its leadership to Bluford. In her interview, Bluford acknowledged the role Franklin played in her life and career. She credited him and Reverend Daniel A. Holmes, a local activist, with teaching her how to both be involved in and cover civic affairs.³⁶²

Francis Murphy acknowledged her father, Carl Murphy, for both her start and departure from journalism. Carl Murphy began grooming Francis as a young girl to take part in the family newspaper business. Despite his desires for his daughter, Carl also knew when to help Francis leave journalism. Boggled down with the responsibilities of single parenthood, Francis felt she needed to dedicate more time to her children and less to the paper. Carl sensed his daughter's struggle and successfully helped usher her out of the newsroom to in front of the classroom. Carl not only helped Francis make this hard decision but he also financially and emotionally supported Francis in her teaching career. She said: "I loved him dearly...He was strict. He gave the appearance of being very gruff, but being the youngest, of course, I hung around him a whole lot, got taken many places where he went and had a very deep understanding of what he was trying to do."³⁶³

Dorothy Gilliam enjoyed her experience at Lincoln University due in large part to her encounters with professors Dr. Armistad Pride and Dr. Lorenzo Greene. Gilliam credited these two men with helping her to further define herself both as a black

³⁶² Bluford Interview, (May 13, 1989), 38.

³⁶³ Murphy Interview, (August 1, 1992), 138.

American and as a journalist: “Dr. Pride took a liking to me early on, and so he was always very encouraging.”³⁶⁴ Dr. Greene taught black history in a way that changed

Gilliam:

He gave us a wider sense of who we were, because so much of the history—even though I had, from a very early stage, been given a pride in myself and a pride in my race through understanding people who had fought the odds and won, he really told us about an earlier history. That’s a history that only now is beginning to emerge in more accepted ways, as we talk about Afrocentrism and trying to correct some of the history that for so long was distorted in the history books, so long hidden away, so long negated and suppressed and reduced. He was one of those real seminal figures in my life, as he really gave us a clearer view of who we were as historical players on the world stage. So that was a very important part of my coming of age and having a sense of who I was. I was just thrilled with him.³⁶⁵

All three of the women in this research were beneficiaries of black male support. As mentors, teachers, fathers, and friends these men offered their encouragement, support, and guidance to their fellow sisters in the struggle.

This project helps to reiterate the important role black women have played in black culture and history. Although less often noted than their male counterparts, black women journalists wrote alongside their men in the fight for equality. In both the black press and mainstream newsrooms, black female journalists received support and help from black male journalists. Such support may be unique because in most professions at the time women reported a “chilly climate” from their mostly male colleagues. The supportive relationships between black men and women journalists certainly helped these

³⁶⁴ Gilliam Interview, (December 14, 1992), 39.

³⁶⁵ Gilliam Interview, (December 14, 1992), 40.

three black women journalists move faster in the profession than most of their white female counterparts in the period.³⁶⁶

Acknowledging Those Who Went Before

The women's ability to recognize and acknowledge those individuals who aided them in their journey is another theme that emerges in the three oral interviews and in their writings. As a prime example, Dorothy Gilliam credited Lucile Bluford for the opportunity to pursue a journalism degree at Lincoln University. Gilliam recounted how Bluford's lawsuit against the University of Missouri led to the creation of a journalism program at Lincoln University.³⁶⁷

Similarly, Bluford credited Marie Ross, the first black journalism student at Kansas University, for paving the way for her. Bluford described how the school's administration discouraged Ross from attending and pursuing a journalism degree and praised Ross's tenacity and drive: "Marie wasn't going to give in, anyway. She was persistent."³⁶⁸ Bluford said that she "got along fine" in the school and "didn't have a bit of trouble" in large part because Ross was the harbinger and her pain and persistence forged a better climate for those who followed.

Murphy lauded her grandfather, John Murphy, as a visionary forerunner who left an impressive legacy for his family. Murphy highlighted her grandfather's rise from slave to business owner. She expressed how impressed she was with her grandfather's progressive nature—a man who left equal shares of the business to his sons and

³⁶⁶ Women trailed their male counterparts in editor positions.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 38.

³⁶⁸ Bluford Interview, (May 13, 1989), 21.

daughters, an uncommon act in his lifetime: “My grandfather was a fair man as far as women were concerned.”³⁶⁹ Murphy also acknowledged how certain key business practices, such as regular family get-togethers and working out differences, instituted by her grandfather, helped her maintain good family and business relations.³⁷⁰

In recognizing how they benefited from those who preceded them these women recognized their part and place in the struggle for equality. The three women all shared this characteristic—they were grateful. With pride and appreciation, these women acknowledged and recounted the experiences of their predecessors, the individuals whose sacrifices paved the path for their lives. This gratitude was a key part of these women’s personal path to empowerment. Acknowledging that they were the beneficiaries of other’s work and sacrifice added to their feelings of empowerment. By knowing and telling these stories of triumph, the women acted as witnesses to how an individual can overcome obstacles and how success can reverberate through the lives of others. It would be interesting to further study the theme of personal predecessors and the role they play in empowerment. Surely these salient stories of achievement influence the way women see themselves and influence the choices they make about their futures.

The Value of Black Schooling

It is also important to note the impact of black schooling on the self-development and self-definition of both Murphy and Gilliam. In their oral histories, both women appreciated their educational experiences in predominantly black schools. Murphy

³⁶⁹ Murphy Interview, (October 25, 1991), 4.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 4-5.

remembered being the beneficiary of a high caliber education as a student of teachers with Ph.D.s in high school:

So what I'm saying is that we had our own of everything. From the time I could wake up in the morning until I went to bed at night, I was taught or handled by well-educated black people who had everything of their own. We didn't know any better and it didn't make any difference to us. We thought we were well educated, and we were.³⁷¹

When it came time to go to college, Murphy wanted to attend an historically black college, but, to her dismay, her father arranged for her to attend the University of Wisconsin. Murphy resented going to the predominantly white school while her high school friends enjoyed a more accepting and less hostile environment in their all-black schools: "One of the things that has disturbed me about my own education was that I left high school and went away to Wisconsin, which I didn't like because of the prejudice."³⁷²

Murphy mentioned on several occasions the value of her black schooling and its role in aiding her development as a black woman and as a student and then as a teacher: "(At black schools) there's no race involved. It's sort of a leveling, where you get in, you teach, you don't even think about race, and that's the kind of experience that every child should have, one that you'd have to just be your own self, either you make it on your own (or you don't) and there's no excuse about money or anything."³⁷³

Even more than Murphy, Gilliam encountered the juxtaposition of the white versus black educational experience. Gilliam took part in the initial integration of Ursuline College and then went to Lincoln University, a historically black college in

³⁷¹ Murphy Interview, (October 25, 1991), 25.

³⁷² Murphy Interview, (May 23, 1992), 73.

³⁷³ Ibid.

Jefferson City, Missouri. Later she attended Tuskegee, also a historically black university, and then went to Columbia University, a predominantly white institution. Gilliam mentioned how her black school education positively affected her: “I’m saying that one of the advantages---though there were many disadvantages -- but one of the advantages of that system (segregation) was that the whole element of race was taken away...(it) gave me a certain strength in terms of sense of self that I took into integrated situations later.”³⁷⁴

These women’s extensive educational experiences in both black and mainstream academia may have contributed to Gilliam and Murphy’s emphasis on race and education in their writing. Even though both women were appreciative of the black school experience, they were advocates for school integration. Gilliam and Murphy, empowered by their segregated education, nevertheless believed that the long-term merits of integration outweighed the benefits of segregated schooling. If desired, black students could always have the opportunity to attend historically black colleges and universities, (HBCUs), but segregation removed that choice—it legally forced students into segregated learning environments. While those environments did have their benefits, there was no denying that the white schools had better learning conditions. Murphy’s articles support the fact that white schools had more money allocated to them, lower student to teacher ratios, and better school buildings. Although segregated schooling offered Murphy and Gilliam positive experiences, they knew the frightful facts about segregation and championed integration with the hope that it would end the disparities in the segregated school system.

³⁷⁴ Gilliam Interview, (December 14, 1992), 27.

Black Feminist Theory: Themes of Empowerment and Resistance

In an effort to further understand their lives and work, this project examined Bluford's, Murphy's, and Gilliam's oral histories and journalistic writing through a black feminist theory lens. Their writing was also analyzed as meeting some of the functions of alternative and ethnic media.

Importance of Self-Redefinition

The life stories of Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam reveal frequent self re-definition. At critical moments in their lives, all three women exhibited personal empowerment as they revised career trajectories to suit new circumstances and priorities. Analysis of these women's lives showed that there was not only one defining moment that made the women who they are, but a succession of moments and/or events. Self-defining and re-defining was an on-going process that came more easily with maturity and experience.

It took a string of bad events to convince Lucile Bluford to reconsider her decision of working at a paper other than the *Call*. Bluford headed back to the *Call* to retrieve her old job but it was taken. Undaunted, Bluford worked for a nearby press until a position at the *Call* opened. Back where she wanted to be, Bluford was unstoppable. She became one of the few black women editors in chief in the black press.

For Murphy and Gilliam, motherhood was the catalyst for a series of self re-definitions. Their decisions about motherhood distinguished them from white women professionals in that era. Ironically at this time, mainstream (white) feminists were fighting for the right to leave the confines of their homes and full-time childrearing

responsibilities in search of professional careers. The black women professionals, in contrast, fought for the privilege to return to their homes to rear their children.

Murphy was engrossed in her full time career as a journalist when her mounting duties at a single mother of three forced her to reevaluate her career. Murphy left journalism to begin her teaching career in hopes of spending more time with her children. For years she taught at the elementary school level to ensure her hours were complementary with her children's schedule. When her children were older she began teaching at the college level.

Although married, Gilliam faced a similar crossroads in her career. She realized she needed better, more motherhood-conducive hours after the birth of her first child. She asked the *Post* for a change in her work schedule. Her request was initially granted but then retracted. Gilliam was frustrated and decided with the birth of her second daughter to take a permanent maternity leave. For years, Gilliam freelanced and worked part-time journalism jobs to achieve a more flexible, child friendly, work schedule. Gilliam redefined and empowered herself as a mother; a mother whose ambitious journalism career could and would revolve around her new role as a mother.

Self-Development

Self-development was crucial for these women. Their ability to re-define themselves enhanced their development as mature, competent self-directed women. One major way these women exhibited their commitment to self-development was through their pursuit of education. All three women pursued graduate degrees and while Bluford did not attain an advanced degree, her persistence in applying to the University of Missouri's graduate program helped start a journalism program at Lincoln University.

The women were constantly seeking to develop themselves in a myriad of ways, but their education and career pursuits stand out most in their oral histories. Gilliam evolved from a beat reporter to an assistant editor and then a columnist. Both Murphy and Bluford developed their professional skills in such a way that they were both editors within 10 years of starting their careers.

Although spiritual regeneration/rejuvenation was the least discussed theme in the women's oral histories, probably because the interviewer did not specifically ask about it, spirituality was an important element in each of these women's lives. Francis Murphy volunteered in the addendum to her interview the important role spiritual support and beliefs played in her life. In our follow-up interview, Dorothy Gilliam spoke passionately of the importance of religious faith and spiritual regeneration in her life.

Alternative and Ethnic Media Theories

Alternative and Ethnic Media theories also helped guide analysis of the women's writing. Alternative Media theory offered an explanation for the power of the black press for which all three women worked at some point in their journalistic careers. Ethnic media theory helped identify the functions of the women's writing in both the black and mainstream press.

The writings of Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam show that they addressed at least two audiences. They wrote to their community/supporters (intra-group communication) and they wrote to those outside their community/non-supporters (extra-group communication). The journalists spoke from a different perspective when addressing different audiences. When speaking primarily to other black citizens and their supporters, they wrote from the first person plural "we" point of view. When speaking to those

outside of the community, they used a third-person point of view. The majority (about 80 percent) of Bluford's and Murphy's editorials could be categorized as intra-group communication. Both journalists more frequently addressed fellow black citizens rather than those outside the black community. Since Gilliam wrote for the *Washington Post*, a mainstream newspaper catering to whites, fewer than one percent of her columns were addressed primarily to the black community.

Ethnic Media theorists identified the four main functions of intra-group communication as: (1) information and motivation; (2) sentinel/watchdog; (3) community booster; and, (4) collective expressions of anger. The most frequent function fulfilled by all three writers was information and motivation. Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam consistently informed their community about issues affecting their communities, and tried to motivate their readers to give to good causes and to attend events, rallies, and protests.

Although ethnic media theory typically distinguishes the information function from the sentinel/watchdog function, this analysis found that all three journalists often seamlessly married these two functions, especially during times of crisis. The writing of these journalists suggests that during times of turmoil and protest, ethnic media may combine these two functions to act as a watchdog/sentinel by informing and motivating the community to political and social activism. These two functions are probably more easily distinguished when an ethnic community does not feel threatened. Perhaps because the women were writing during the Civil Rights Movement era, these two functions were often merged in the same piece of writing. It would be interesting to investigate this

possibility further -- to analyze ethnic media functions during a time of transition and flux versus a more stable period in an ethnic community.

The community booster function was also clear in all three of the women's writings. Each of the journalists routinely lauded individuals in their communities as well as important figures in the Civil Rights Movement. This writing provided inspirational bright spots amid the hardship and dark days of the time. Among all the columns and editorials about protests, injustice, violence, and struggle, the stories of the valiant ones provided examples of what was possible. Bluford, Murphy, and Gilliam wrote of the brave men and women participating in boycotts, the success of black students in national competitions, and the young people who were breaking racial barriers in education and at work. These success stories offered hope to a community struggling for identity and equality in a hostile nation.

Shining a spotlight on successful individuals was far more prominent in the women's writings than the collective expression of anger function. It is interesting to see that even in this time of grave injustice and violence, these journalists focused more of their writings on the positive stories of the movement rather than their anger at setbacks and further injustice.

Lucile Bluford, Dorothy Gilliam, and Francis Murphy continually empowered themselves both in their personal and professional lives. They wrote at a time when their participation was crucial. Their stories speak to the possibility of black women's empowerment despite all odds. Their written words highlight the power of resistance. By acknowledging their work, we, too, are empowered.

APPENDIX A

- Fatimah Salleh:* Hi, Ms. Gilliam. This is Fatimah Salleh.
- Dorothy Gilliam:* Hi, how are you?
- Fatimah Salleh:* I'm doing well. Is 10:00 – did we say 10:00 or 10:30?
- Dorothy Gilliam:* 10:00 is fine.
- Fatimah Salleh:* Wonderful. I'm sorry. At the point where you called me, I was in the car taking my 87-year-old grandmother to the doctor, so I was trying to do two things at once, which doesn't always work for me. But, I'm going to just introduce the topic. I, actually, my dissertation is on how black women journalists both empowered and resisted
- Dorothy Gilliam:* Fatimah Salleh, just a moment. I had stepped away to close my office door, so I didn't hear the topic.
- Fatimah Salleh:* My dissertation topic is on how black women journalists, specifically you, Lucile Bluford, and Francis Murphy, both empowered themselves and resisted through their work. How they displayed resistance through their journalism. So I take your interviews that were recorded – the six interviews you did, the oral interviews you did for the woman journalism project – and then I evaluate also your writings during the Civil Rights Movement. So your column, things like that that you wrote.
- Dorothy Gilliam:* You evaluated the columns over twenty years?
- Fatimah Salleh:* Uh-huh. I've been looking at them. It's been pretty awesome. So I look at that, and I also look at your interviews. First of all, I have to say I'm absolutely fascinated with you. I've just been very fascinated at your work. And also, how well you've expressed the views and the views of African Americans over time. So one of my first questions to you is, how would you, first and foremost, how would you describe your career as a journalist while working during the Civil Rights Movement?
- Dorothy Gilliam:* Just during the Civil Rights Movement? That's what you're talking about?
- Fatimah Salleh:* Yes, ma'am.
- Dorothy Gilliam:* Because that would have been those early years. That was such a long period, in a sense, and such an early period in my life. Can you hear me all right, because I have you on speaker? If I need to hold it to my ear, I'll do that.
- Fatimah Salleh:* No, no. I can hear you perfectly.
- Dorothy Gilliam:* Okay. As you know, the first experience I had with the Civil Rights Movement was right after I had graduated from Lincoln

University, and went to work for the *Tri-State Defender*. At that point, my boss was Alex Wilson. He was the editor of the *Tri-State Defender*. Because he had a terrible, I was going to say accident, but it wasn't. He was beaten terribly during that civil rights era, that's how I had an opportunity to actually travel to Little Rock and cover the Little Rock Nine.

That whole period – I probably should have gotten some of these questions before. I could have done this a little better. But that whole period during the early Civil Rights Movement, really kind of started from that serendipitous moment, which is when I was not only able to go and cover the story from the perspective of a journalist covering Little Rock, but also as a beginning journalist. So that whole period was a very exciting period.

I think the best way to describe it, for me in terms of what I experienced, was that it was an incredible opportunity to be a first-hand witness to the Little Rock Nine at a time when I very least expected it, because I was working in Memphis as a beginning reporter. I was 20 years old. Because Little Rock is close to Memphis, and because my boss went to cover Little Rock, which he would definitely always do. But because he was merciless beaten by the mob, I went over to Little Rock to help him, and that's how I ended up having that opportunity.

Had he not been beaten by the mob, I suspect I would not have even gone to Little Rock. He said he knew that I was very young. He knew I didn't have a lot of experience. And also, I was a girl, as he said. So that combination – especially compared to his – he was a very intelligent man. He was gruff, but he also had a kindness about him. He was really working hard to help shape me into a journalist, given my relative inexperience, although I had some experience while I was in college.

Fatimah Salleh:

Now, can I ask you, what do you feel has empowered you the most, as both a woman, an African American woman, and also as a journalist? What do you feel empowers you?

Dorothy Gilliam:

You know, I think in my earlier life I would have said a person or some individuals, but I think it's a combination of things. I think it's a combination of that I was brought up in a family. A very, very strong family. My dad was an _____ minister, and my mother was an _____ minister's wife. I say it that way because that's a big role. So I was brought up in the church. I was actually pretty much born in the church. The values of the church and my community, the values of some strong people that I had met. I'd been very, very fortunate to have that in my life.

But I think if I had to kind of look to a single, most empowering piece at this point, as I look back in my life, I would have to say it was my faith in God. As I look back and I see the grace in so many ways. I drifted, I did this, I did that. But I think that's one of the things that gave me the values that helped me to succeed.

For example, when I first came to *The Washington Post* as the only African American, as the first African American woman in 1961, that was very, very tough slogging in so many ways. Washington was still a very sleepy, segregated town. My work was made more difficult because of my race.

Just trying to hail a taxicab to go to an assignment, or to come back from assignments. Cabs would just pass me by with nobody in them because they made assumptions about where I was going and who I was. It was a time when some of my *Washington Post* colleagues would see me on the street and pretend they didn't know me because they didn't want to speak to a black person, or be seen speaking to a black person, or appear to know a black person.

Those kind of experiences, I think had I not had the values that gave me, despite the hurt and despite the emotional pain of rejection. If I had not had the values that told me that I'm a child of God and I was made in the image of God. I don't think I was necessarily seeing it like that at that time, but as I look back on my life, in so many ways I see those lessons that I learned from those early days were the sustaining force through some really, really incredible experiences.

The creative competition of *The Washington Post*, which was high drama. Covering the Civil Rights Movement. There were so many incidents surrounding that. Going into the south, going into Mississippi at the time of the integration of Old Miss.

Fatimah Salleh:

James Meredith. Yes.

Dorothy Gilliam:

Right. When the tensions were so high and the rebelliousness of the south was so strong that President Kennedy had to call out 32,000 troops in order to get this one man onto the campus of Old Miss and to be enrolled in school.

So I'm going in the middle of these things. Once again, when I look back, I just feel like so much grace has surrounded me. A lot of people in my life who have helped me, have shown me, taken me by the hand, that's been – looking back now, I can see that those things were not happenstance.

So I think there have been some wonderful, wonderful people who have been part of the – I would say almost like a family or a

community that have surrounded me. Some in the black press. Some over the years from *The Post*. Some in my community. Some from earlier periods. It has made all the difference in the world.

Fatimah Salleh: And do you consider those people to be part of God's grace for you? They're coming into your life and affecting you? Is that part, for you, of God's grace?

Dorothy Gilliam: Yes. I see that now in a way that I probably wouldn't have seen it then. I think back, for example, this past weekend I went to Columbia for my 50th anniversary.

Fatimah Salleh: Wow. Congratulations.

Dorothy Gilliam: Thank you. So one of the people – you think about it. I'm 23 years old; I'm going into New York. I had a few experiences, but this was very different. This was Ivy League. There was so much that I didn't know. I think I felt that so many of the people in my class were so much more experienced than I was. They had travelled abroad. Going to Europe. That was nothing. I'd never been out of the country. I'd never been to the west coast of the nation, you know.

But there was one friend, one person who I became such good friends with. She was a rich woman, now dead. But we just became close over the years. So when I think of the role that she played in my life, I have to think that it's grace.

I think of my friend Sam Yette, who died recently. He's the author of the book called The Choice: The Issue of Black Survival in America. I met him during the time I worked at *Jet Magazine*, and he worked at *Ebony* when I lived in Chicago for a couple of years. He was somebody I could call years afterwards and talk over ideas for my columns. He was the one, when we had the riots in Washington, my husband sent me and our kids out to stay with them because the riots were so close to our doorstep.

When you look back on people like that – he was the one when I decided I wanted to leave *Jet* and go to Columbia so that I could get into daily newspaper journalism. I was told by Columbia that I didn't have enough liberal arts hours. So I needed some additional liberal arts hours in order to be accepted.

I was sharing that with Sam and he said, "Well, I'm going to be leaving to go down to become the Director at the Information Bureau at Tuskegee Institute. So why don't you come down and work with me, and you can take your liberal arts hours at Tuskegee?" And I was able to do that, and we became friends and supporters over the years.

So when I look back on the role of people like that in my life that spanned a period of more than 50 years, you just have to say it's grace. That's my take on it.

Fatimah Salleh:

How wonderful. I firmly believe that in my life as well. I firmly believe raising my three boys and finishing this doctorate, I'm like there's no way I'm going to do without grace. I almost feel like dedicating the dissertation to God's Grace while I'm actually here doing it. I completely agree.

I wanted to ask you a couple more questions. Number one, what do you feel is the theme to your work? If you could give a theme to your written work, to your articles you've written over time as you look back, what is the theme to your work?

Dorothy Gilliam:

A single theme?

Fatimah Salleh:

Yeah, you can have many themes if you want. But what comes to your mind as something that's prevalent and, sort of, underneath it all? Do you have one? Do you have many?

Dorothy Gilliam:

Well, I guess having the experience of being one of those trail blazers. Being one of only two African Americans in my class at Columbia; having that pioneer role at *The Washington Post*; just so many times I've been in those positions. I'm very aware of the need of diversity. The need for having more people like me, who look like me.

So I think one theme in much of what I do has been trying to increase the understanding of America and of blacks and other people of color ourselves, to know who we are. To know what our potential is. I've always thought of myself as a person who had a lot of respect for my community. I've tried to show that in my work. So, in terms of writing about race and gender and social issues and history, I always want my respect for my community to be evident, because this is part of the way people of color see themselves. That's part of a tapestry that helps them understand who they are.

This has not always been easy because one gets accused of being pro-black, and not objective, and a lot of other things. But over the years – things have changed a great deal now. But, over the years, I've gotten many, many, many hate letters and everything else from people who just don't want to hear it.

But I think in the columns and a lot of what I've written about and worked on, it's been about trying to show our struggle, trying to put our struggle in historical context, trying to keep the dream and the hope alive, as J.J. would say. Because in writing stories about people who have succeeded and had success and all of that, that's part of trying to keep hope alive.

It's funny because when I graduated from Columbia and first went to *The Post*, I thought, "I don't want to be stereotyped. I want to be a journalist who covers everything." I was going to what I thought were silly features about hundred-year-old women having their birthday party. Once they sent me to do a story on some urban garden and I thought, "What in the world?" Meanwhile, they declared the War on Poverty and there was so much to write about in the city. So I went back and said, "Listen. I want to be on the welfare beat. I want to be on the beat that deals with people and communities, and black and communities."

And that's what I did, and that's when those stories started hitting page one because there's so much richness that had not been told. I think even today there's so little about the black community that really gets written about. The black community is much more than poverty, but if you look at just the way the media covers poverty, for example. I would never stereotype our people in that way, but that's just an example in that one aspect of our lives, and one that disproportionately touches African Americans.

You rarely see any good stories about the issues of how the poor are surviving during these perilous times. You see the big foreclosure. After Katrina, there were lots of stories about the bodies and the people who were piled up and stranded on bridges and things like that. But after those big stories are over, they seem to fade from view.

Unfortunately, I am so sorry about this because I think we've reached the point where the public doesn't want to hear about. They often say, "Well, it's their fault," or, "They shouldn't be so shiftless and lazy." And they move on. But these are important stories to tell, and it's about telling the whole story. We have so many successes, and we're proud of President Obama and Oprah and Lady Michelle, but there is still a lot of people at the bottom without much hope.

So I guess that theme of bringing about change has always been a part of my life as a journalist. Luckily, I was able to write a column for almost 20 years where I could really have an opinion. That in itself was another blessing.

The other piece was that, as an assistant editor in the *Style* section of *The Post*, I had several, I had a cluster of journalist with whom I worked. We did a lot of good stories about black culture and black historians. Some of the deep intellectuals. We did a lot of good work. I think that's been a theme.

And then in more recent years, well not really – I think the corollary that I did simultaneously with the journalism, was working in various minority journalism organizations to help

increase the number of minorities in the media. I started back in the '70s when I became a board member of the Maynard Institute. Well, it was called The Institute for Journalism Education. I was on the board there.

We started programs where we trained journalists in the summer and sent them into newspapers around the country. These were small newspapers, and these were people who were coming into the field from other professions. So they came with – they were not your typical students. But that Maynard Institute, I became the chair of the board. It still exists today and I'm still actually on the board. But that was one way of trying to increase the diversity in the mainstream media. Again, trying to help change the face of blacks in America –

I think that was my assistant. Can you call me back in about five minutes?

Fatimah Salleh: I sure can.

Dorothy Gilliam: Okay. Bye.

[End of Audio]

Part II:

Fatimah Salleh: Hi, Ms. Gilliam. This is Fatimah Salleh again. Is it an okay time to continue the interview?

Dorothy Gilliam: Yes, let me shut my door again. Okay.

Fatimah Salleh: So reading through your interviews, I found a couple things I wanted to ask. One was, how do you feel motherhood affected your journalism career? Another type of big question, but I remember you taking time off after your second, and also asking to go part-time after your first daughter.

Dorothy Gilliam: Motherhood has just affected my whole life in such a profoundly wonderful way. I guess if my daughters had not turned out pretty well, I would have felt a career didn't mean very much. But again, God's grace. They're all doing well. But just the love, the involvement, the support, the growth that motherhood provides.

I think when I first got married – and I was young. I was 24. I wasn't even thinking about children. I was just thinking about getting married and having a career. When I got pregnant the first year and then my daughter was born, this was just an incredible experience. If I had been one of those people who had thought, one of those women who had thought from an early point that, "Oh, I can't wait to be a mother," or whatever, it would not have

been so shocking to me how this little one was just grabbing my heart and my life.

It's so interesting because I have not been that good at fighting for myself. But when it was time to fight to take time off, to try and get flex time off, all of that stuff because my children, I rose to the occasion. I've learned to take care of myself since, but in those early days I was focused on getting the job done. So I just think motherhood has been an incredible blessing in my life, and just continues to be.

Fatimah Salleh: Wonderful. You know, as so many interviews have been done with you, and people have written so much about you, is there anything that you would like me to include? Or is there anything – the book about you, or a chapter about you, or anything written about you – that it would be incomplete if it were not included? Is there anything that if you think anyone writes about you, or in comments or interviews, is there something that you would always want evident? Or feel like it would be an incomplete study or interview if you had not addressed something, or said something?

Dorothy Gilliam: Interesting question. And I have to tell you, so many things that have been written, I have never read. So, I'm not sure what's out there.

Fatimah Salleh: By the way, I was going to send you a copy of my dissertation when it's all said and done, if that's okay with you.

Dorothy Gilliam: Oh definitely. Yeah, I'd like to see it. You've named a couple of my heroes, in terms of Lucile Bluford and Francis Murphy. I'd very much like to see it, and look forward to getting it. I'll give you my home address. When is your projected date of finishing it?

Fatimah Salleh: I'm actually finishing it up now. I will probably defend in August, but the final copy will have to be done in June. So you will get it no later than September after the defense.

Dorothy Gilliam: I see. Well, it's very imminent.

Fatimah Salleh: Yes, it is. And it's been quite a long time coming. I think I'm going to burn my backpack when it's all said and done.

Dorothy Gilliam: I can imagine.

Fatimah Salleh: But I was just thinking about all of these interviews I've read about you, and the things people have included in books. I thought if there was one question I would ask you, is there something you always want projected when someone writes about you? Is there something that you think, "This is incomplete if they did not acknowledge x about my life."

Dorothy Gilliam: Yeah, I'm just thinking about that.

Fatimah Salleh: We can come back to it. Do you want to come back to it?

Dorothy Gilliam: Yeah, because I think in a way when you ask about what had empowered me, I think that aspect of my life is probably one I have not talked a lot about, in terms of my relationship with God. That is something that I think has kind of flowered more in recent years. I know that in academic thesis, those kind of things are kind of hard to discuss. But –

Fatimah Salleh: Actually, not in mine. I actually have a whole section on spiritual rejuvenation and spiritual regeneration. So this is one of the keys to being empowered.

Dorothy Gilliam: Well, that's interesting, and we're on the same page.

Fatimah Salleh: Yes, ma'am. So I'm very grateful, because I was reading a lot of your interviews, and I didn't get a lot of that. I got a lot that your father was and that your mother supported him. But I didn't get necessarily in those interviews what your take on spirituality was. So this interview –

Dorothy Gilliam: Well, and I think I've seen something of an evolution over the years. As I said, I was born and grew up in the church and all that. And then when I got married, I married an artist. When we were married, he was also a teacher. He was a Baptist and I was a Methodist. So I just assumed that we'd continue to go to church. I mean those were the days back in the early '60s when people didn't do as much premarital stuff as they may do today.

But when our first child was born and started growing up, he said, "I don't want those kids being brought up in that old, dogmatic religion." I said, "Well, I'm taking them somewhere on Sunday. Are you going to take them to the art gallery?" He said, "No." I said, "Are you going to take them to the museums?" He said, "No." I said, "I'm not going to have them sit here and watch television on Sunday. They can do all these other things during the week." But I did try to compromise.

So basically, we went to a Unitarian church. There was one in our neighborhood, because we always lived in the city of Washington. It was an unusual time because the pastor was an African American who – he was not your traditional Unitarian minister. But it was more intellectual than getting the real Spirit, you know, evoking a real spirit in me. And it was a useful place to be in a sense because it was a time of social action, my writing was about it, and my daughters went to their youth group. But there was still something missing.

My marriage, unfortunately – we were married for 20 years and separated after 20 years. By then the girls were growing up. One of our daughters was already in college. But I started going to

Unity – I was still kind of searching on the spiritual paths. I wasn't – I had gotten away from the old AME piece. I was still very, kind of on a spiritual path because, in a way, I just didn't feel I was getting from the Unitarian church what I needed.

What happened after that was I started kind of more of a spiritual search. As a result, I got into some twelve-step support groups. There was a woman I met at work – a Caribbean woman – who was there as a temporary hire. Clerical.

We became friendly at *The Post*. She invited me to women's brunch. I went to that and there were a lot of Caribbean women there. They were sitting around and talking about believing God, and healing, and faith, and how God was working in their lives. You know, this one in Jamaica, and this one here. I went back to the kitchen and said to my friend, "What are they talking about? This faith stuff?"

Because it was a whole different – I was raised in the church, and believing in God, and all that. But when you leave home – there was just a lot I had not internalized. A lot I had not – there was a lot of spiritual evolving that I had to do. So, this Caribbean woman who became my friend, she said, "Maybe we should start a spiritual group." She thought maybe we could bring some women together and do Bible study and this kind of stuff.

That happened and, little by little, that group – we started it, well, it's been almost 30 years now when I look back. No, it's been more like twenty-something years. I think I'm exaggerating. But it was in the '80s when we started. We officially ended it a few years ago, but we still get together once or twice a year. We still keep in touch with each other and support each other and pray for each other.

But that group was a very important part of my spiritual journey. I was still working at *The Post*. But these women were able to help me see and understand through our Bible reading, and our study of God, et cetera, how one's faith played out in their everyday life. I think some of the attitudes that I had, I had to discard. I think working at a place like *The Post* kind of puts you in a pretty specialized category in Washington or wherever. And when you have a column, you have a lot of visibility.

So even though I guess I never thought of myself as being very cocky, because I knew how hard it was. I knew how hard it was to write the columns. To get the feedback. To write a column and walk in the newsroom and nobody says anything, so you know everybody's saying, "My goodness. What in the world was she talking about?" So many of the topics on black people – you know

black race is still a lightning rod issue today. So you know it was back when I was writing during the '80s and '90s.

But this women's group, when things came up, I was able to talk about them. I remember when it looked like *The Post* wanted me to do something different. I'd been writing the column for almost 20 years, 18 years. I had a choice.

Am I going to go to the community and say, "*The Post* wants me to quit this column because I'm writing too much about race."

And that was really one of the reasons. I mean one of the editors told me, "You just write too much about race." Or she told somebody else, and they told me, so that was the issue.

But as I talked it over with these women, and got into the Bible, and all this, I could hear some of the things they were saying. Like, "You were not promised a column for life, you know? Give yourself a chance to open up to something else. To open up to something new." I could have, at that kind of crossroad, done something that would have been very detrimental to my career. I might have lasted another year or two writing the column.

But with the help of these women, you know, from the Caribbean, government workers, nobody was doing what I was doing. They helped me to open my mind to that there may be a different calling. And in many ways, it looked like all of the things I'd been doing during my career, which was not only doing the journalism, but also the volunteer work I was doing at The Institute for Journalism Education, and They Maynard Institute, and then as president of the National Association of Black Journalists.

All of those things seemed to kind of introduce a new possibility when I wanted to start this program at *The Post* to work with urban high school kids. I found out in 1997 that not a single high school in Washington published a high school newspaper. I was just outraged. I realized I'd been running around the country on weekends, attending NABJ meetings, and Maynard Institute meetings, and board meetings, and just all the stuff that's involved in that work. And right here in my own hometown, we had kids who are deprived of the opportunity of even publishing a newspaper.

So *The Post* was open to starting this Young Journalist Development Program. I was able to move from the column writing in a very smooth way, and say good-bye to my column, and move into this new post. It brought a lot of the concerns with diversity, and the next generation, and with black people, and our future. It gave me a way to really focus on that.

And then, after starting that program and growing it – I had an assistant who was able to take over – I was able to come over here to GW as a fellow and develop this primary media program. It's a program where we get professional journalists and GW interns and send them into high schools to help high school students create their own student media newspapers, online, television, radio.

So, if I had not been on a spiritual path when I was faced with that crisis moment – What do I do about the column? Do I go out and fight and rally the community? Or do I find a way to graciously exit and turn the particular energy I had from *The Post* at that moment – because if they want you to do something else, they'll help you do it. If they want you out of one spot, they'll help you to achieve the other.

So hundreds of thousands of dollars were invested over the years into the Young Journalist Development Program that I was able to start those last few years at *The Post*. Only God could have been a part of helping me where I am today in terms of this program. We have a _____ in Washington, D.C. We have a _____ in Philadelphia. My dream is that we expand it to other cities, so we'll see how that goes.

Fatimah Salleh: My prayers are with you

Dorothy Gilliam: I'm running out of time

Fatimah Salleh: Yes, you are. So let me let you go. I just want to ask one fast question. When you were writing your articles for the column, do you think you were addressing the articles more to the white community, the black community, or both

Dorothy Gilliam: Oh, absolutely both. I really, really resent the idea of just writing to tell white people about black people. Both.

Fatimah Salleh: Okay. Thank you so much.

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